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The Spoilers

*All the women loved Mel Traynor.
That was why somebody had killed him.*

A Police Files Novelette

BY JONATHAN CRAIG

THE BEDROOM was small and hot and humid, and the unmade bed on which I sat had a slightly dank smell, as if the linens had not been changed for a long time. I crossed one knee over the other, took out my notebook, and glanced at the girl who sat on the straight chair near the window. She was fac-



ing me, but her eyes kept straying to the door that led to the living room, as if she were straining to hear every sound the techs and the assistant M.E. made as they worked over her husband's body.

"You feel a little better now, Mrs. Traynor?" I asked.

Her eyes met mine for a moment, then strayed back to the door again. "Yes."

I studied her. She was somewhere in her middle twenties, an exceptionally pretty girl with blue eyes and dark brown hair. But there was something about her eyes and the set of her mouth that, even now, was almost hard.

"Would you mind telling me about it again?" I asked.

She moistened her lips, still looking at the door. "I've already told you. Mel didn't answer the door, so I let myself in with my key — and there he was."

"Did you phone him before you came over?"

"No."

"Why not?"

Her eyes swung back to mine. "He was still my husband, wasn't he? Since when do women have to make appointments to see their own husbands?"

"Just take it easy, Mrs. Traynor," I said gently. "I'm merely trying to —"

"Well, I didn't phone him. I'd been out walking, and thinking things over, and I decided to stop by and talk to him. I do that a lot —

walk in the rain, I mean." Her voice was even and unhurried, but very taut and thin, as if she were having trouble keeping a rein on her emotions.

"You've been separated — four months, was it?"

"That's right; four months. I left him in February."

"Why?"

"I thought it might jar some sense into him."

"In what way?"

"What way do you think?"

"Look, Mrs. Traynor," I said, "I don't like to press you at a time like this, but —"

"I left him because he couldn't remember he was married," she said. "Oh, I'm not saying it was all his fault. Mel was one of these men that women just naturally go for. They wouldn't let him alone; God knows why. He was nothing but a bum, and that's all he ever would have been — a bum."

"What line of work was Mr. Traynor in?"

"Work? Mel? You must be kidding. Mel Traynor quit his job two months after we were married, and he never worked another day. That was three years ago, and the only money he's had since was what I gave him and whatever he got from the other women he fooled around with. All I ever gave him was enough for a bottle of whiskey and a couple of rolls of film a week. He got the rest of it from those other women. Can you imagine that? I'd give him

money for film, and then he'd turn right around and use it up taking pictures of other women."

"Let's take it from the time you got here," I said. "You told me you arrived at a few minutes past four."

She nodded. "It had been raining all day, and I knew that Mel wouldn't have gone out to take pictures. He always did, you know; every time the weather was nice. I rang the buzzer a couple of times. When he didn't answer, I thought that maybe he'd had too much to drink or — or that maybe he had another girl in here. So I let myself in." She paused, staring down at her folded hands. "I — I almost tripped over him. He was lying right there by the door, just to one side of it. I didn't know he was dead. There wasn't any blood, and I . . ." She compressed her lips for a moment, shaking her head slowly. "At first I thought he'd had a heart attack or something. Then I bent down over him — and that's when I saw what had happened to the back of his head."

"Did you notice the camera at the time?"

"No. Not just then. I didn't notice it until after I called the police."

"Did you touch your husband's body in any way, Mrs. Traynor?"

"No."

"Or the camera?"

"No."

"What'd you do when you realized Mr. Traynor was dead?"

"I told you. I called the police."

"I mean before you called the police."

"Nothing. I went straight to the phone."

"You didn't go into any of the other rooms first? Back here to the bedroom, for instance?"

"No. Why in the world would I do a thing like that?"

"Well, for one thing it might have occurred to you that your husband's killer was still in the apartment."

She stared at me, her eyes rounding a little. "I — I never thought of that. I was too stunned."

"I see."

"If I'd thought anything like that, I'd have run out of the apartment and called from someplace else."

"You say Mr. Traynor had no income, other than what he received from you and from other women?"

"That's right."

"You made the living for both of you?"

"Yes — I'm a beauty operator."

"Do you know who's been giving your husband money since your separation?"

She hesitated. "I have, for one. I — I wanted to come back to him, but he wouldn't let me."

"Have you any idea who might have killed him, Mrs. Traynor? Any enemies you know of? Any jealous husbands or boy friends in the picture?"

She smiled bitterly. "There must have been a lot of them. Jealous men, I mean. But lately Mel had settled on one girl."

"You know who she is?"

"I certainly do. I called her on the phone a couple of times and told her to stay away from him."

"You want to give me her name?"

"Nancy Hammond. She lives with her mother, over on West Seventy-second. I forget the exact address, but the phone number is Circle 9-8344. I was going over there and read the riot act to her once, but I was afraid of what I might do to her."

I made a note of the name and number, and then I said, "About enemies he might have had — do you know of any?"

"No."

"Was he in trouble of any kind? Gambling debts, civil actions, unpaid personal loans — anything like that?"

"No, not that I know of."

"He carry any insurance?"

She looked at me knowingly. "I was wondering when you'd get around to asking that one. . . . No — he carried no insurance. All he had in the world was a few clothes and that camera I gave him. That Rollei."

"That what?"

"Rolleiflex. That's the kind of camera it is."

The door to the living room opened and my detective partner, Walt Logan, came in. Walt's one of

these long, gaunt, scholarly-looking guys with a thin, pleasant face and a brush cut. He weighs in at about one-sixty, but every ounce of it is pure cop.

"The M.E. just finished up, Steve," he said.

I nodded and got to my feet. "Please wait here a few minutes, Mrs. Traynor," I said. "I'll be back with you as soon as I can."

2.

After the door was shut behind us, I turned to Walt. "How close a fix have we got on the time of death?" I asked.

"The doc says it happened sometime between two and three o'clock this afternoon."

I glanced at my watch. It was a quarter of six. "Mrs. Traynor told me she got here a few minutes past four," I said. "The squeal came in at four-ten."

"Did she tell you where she was before she got here?" Walt asked.

"Yes. Walking around in the rain."

Walt smiled grimly. "She'll have to do better than that, Steve. Walking around in the rain! For God's sake."

I shrugged. "We'll see, Walt."

The assistant M.E. called to us from the far side of the living room and Walt and I walked over to where he knelt beside the dead man.

"He died from a blow or blows to the back of the head," the doc said.

"Offhand I'd say he was struck just once, but I can't be certain about that till after the autopsy. He took one hell of a wallop, though — you don't need an autopsy to see that."

"Any doubt about the camera's being the murder weapon?" I asked.

He closed his instrument bag and snapped it shut. "Damn little, Steve. We'll have to run it through the lab, of course, but it'll be just so much lost time."

"Anything else you can tell us?" I asked.

"Did Walt give you the time limits on the time of death?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's just about all I can do for you. If I find out anything more at Bellevue, I'll let you know."

"All right, doc. Send the ambulance attendants in on your way past the wagon and I'll turn the body over to them."

I bent down to peer at the dead man once again. He had been about thirty-five, I guessed, a very handsome, muscular man with an unusually low forehead and a lot of thick, black hair just starting to turn gray at the temples. There was no blood on the floor, and very little on the back of his head, but there was no question about the force with which he'd been hit.

I straightened up and looked over toward the techs who were working on the camera. In its leather case, it seemed to be about six inches long and four inches wide, a sturdy,

heavy reflex camera that, swung by its shoulder strap, would be capable of inflicting even more damage than Mel Traynor had suffered. If the camera had been used in that manner — swung in an arc at the end of the shoulder strap — the size and sex of the user wouldn't have made too much difference. A woman could have handled such a weapon easily, and effectively. On the other hand, if the camera had been grasped in the hand — as a brick might be grasped — the chances were that Mel Traynor's killer had been a man. I doubted whether, using only the leverage of her arm, a woman could have struck such a blow.

The ambulance attendants came in, put Traynor's body in a basket, signed a receipt for it, and carried it away.

"Keep an eye on things for a while, Walt," I said. "I'm going to have a couple more words with Mrs. Traynor."

Walt grinned wryly. "That's a great story she's got. 'Walking around in the rain.' Lord."

I went back into the bedroom and sat down on the bed again. Mrs. Traynor had moved to the window, where she stood gazing out at the rain.

"I didn't catch your first name, Mrs. Traynor," I said.

She didn't move or speak for several seconds; then she turned slightly to look at me over her shoulder. "Leda," she said.

"How long had you been walking

around before you came here?"

She sighed and sank down on her chair again. "Hours," she said. "All afternoon."

"You have any idea where you were between two and three o'clock?"

She gave me that knowing look again. "Why don't you just come right out and accuse me?"

"Just a routine question, Mrs. Traynor."

"Oh, sure! Of course it is."

"Can you tell me where you were?"

She stared at me sullenly for a moment, then looked back once again at the door that led to the living room.

"No," she said. "Not exactly. I walked along Central Park West, and then I walked in the park a while. I . . . No, I can't tell you where I was between two and three o'clock. But I can tell you one thing — I wasn't here."

"Were you in the habit of visiting your husband, Mrs. Traynor?"

She took a deep breath and let it out very slowly. "Yes. I came by quite often. I don't know why; I just had to, that's all. I hated him, and still . . . Oh, I don't know just how I felt. All I know is that I couldn't stay away. I — I thought I could break off with him, but I just couldn't. He was that kind of man — just like dope or something."

"You said Mr. Traynor was concentrating on just one girl," I said. "How do you know that?"

"He told me so. It's funny, but you'd think a man like that would be able to lie his head off. But Mel couldn't. He couldn't lie at all — at least not to me. He told me he wanted to marry Nancy Hammond, and that if I didn't give him a divorce he'd go out to Nevada or somewhere and get one himself. That's why I called the little bitch and told her to leave him alone. I knew he meant what he said, and I thought that if I could scare Nancy away from him I might have a chance of getting him back."

"Do you happen to know how Nancy felt about all this?"

"She was crazy about him. I told you how he affected women. Well, this Nancy was so far gone that she wasn't even in her right mind. I walked in on them once . . ." She paused. "God, I'll never forget it. I let myself in one night, you see. It was pretty late, and I was just as quiet about it as I could be. And there she stood, right in the middle of the floor, just as naked as a girl can get. But do you think it bothered her? Oh, no — not Nancy Hammond. She heard Mel say my name, and realized who I was, and the first thing you know she's right on top of me with her fingernails going like a cat's. I shoved her off me, and Mel got between us, and then she just stood there with her hands on her hips, mother-naked, calling me names I'd never even heard of before. And her so sweet and innocent looking that you'd

swear she'd faint if the wind happened to come along and blow her skirt up a few inches above her knees."

I got up and moved to the door. "You wouldn't mind sticking around the apartment for a while, would you?" I asked.

The blue eyes narrowed a little. "Of course I mind. What's that got to do with it? I haven't any choice."

3.

I closed the door behind me and walked over to Walt Logan.

"The techs'll be here for a couple of hours," I said. "Supposing you hang around, Walt. Bring Mrs. Traynor out here with you so you can keep an eye on her."

"You think she's our girl, Steve?"

"She might be. But if she is, she's going to make us prove it. She's a tough little apple, Walt. I'll say one thing for her: if she killed that man, she's the coolest killer I ever saw."

"She still sticking to that story about walking in the rain?"

"Yes."

Walt shook his head. "That's one for the book."

I went to the phone, called BCI, and asked for run-throughs on Melvin Traynor, Leda Traynor, and Nancy Hammond. While I waited for BCI to call back, I looked up the address that matched the name and number Mrs. Traynor had given me. The phone was listed in the

name of Mrs. Martha Hammond at 21 West 72nd Street.

BCI called in a few minutes to say there was no record on any of the three people I had asked about. I thanked the officer who had made the search, hung up, and headed for the door.

"I'm going over to talk with Mr. Traynor's girl friend, Walt," I said. "If I'm not through in an hour or so, I'll give you a call."

"Check."

"If anything comes up, call me on Circle 9-8344. That's the girl friend's phone number."

I walked down the three flights of steps to the sidewalk and across the rain-swept street to the department sedan. As I started the motor, I glanced back at the five-story converted brownstone. Walt and I had, of course, talked to the other tenants. No one had seen or heard anything. And there was no desk, switchboard, or elevator — which meant that anyone at all could enter and leave unseen. All he or she would have to do was push the buttons beneath a few of the mailboxes and wait for some careless tenant to release the automatic butler. All the tenants had said, however, that they had not released the lock all day.

I sat studying the house a moment longer; then I eased the sedan away from the curb and started for Nancy Hammond's place on 72nd Street.

The Hammond apartment was large and bright and everything in it seemed to be so new that you half

expected to see a price tag here or there. It looked more like a furniture display room than it did a place to live in.

4.

The woman who answered my ring was in her late thirties, a very blonde, very slender woman with wide-set gray eyes and full, almost pouting, lips.

I showed her my badge. "Detective Manning," I said. "Is Nancy Hammond here?"

The woman shook her head slowly, still looking at my badge. "Why, no. She and a girl friend went to a movie."

"Do you expect her back soon?"

"Yes. Any minute now, in fact." Her eyes came up to meet mine. "I'm Nancy's mother. What did you want to see her about?"

"I wanted to ask her a few questions about a friend of hers."

"I see. . . . Well, won't you sit down?"

I sat down at one end of a long sofa and Mrs. Hammond sat down at the other. She was studying me curiously, smiling a little to hide the concern in her eyes.

"Just what was it, now?" she asked. "Maybe I can help you."

"Maybe you can. Do you know a man named Mel Traynor, Mrs. Hammond?"

The smile left her face instantly and her body seemed to tense. "Yes," she said. "I know him. . . . Or

rather, I know of him." She moved a bit closer to me. "What's this all about, Mr. Manning?"

"You don't know Mr. Traynor personally, is that it?"

"No, I don't know him. I've never seen him."

"I understand he's a special friend of your daughter's," I said.

Mrs. Hammond took a deep breath. "Yes. Unfortunately, that's the case."

"You don't care for him, I take it."

"Care for him? Indeed I do not care for him. . . . Look, Mr. Manning . . . as Nancy's mother I feel I'm entitled to know just what this is all about."

"I'm sorry," I said. "This is police business, Mrs. Hammond. We'll have to leave the questions up to me." I paused. "Seeing you've never met Mr. Traynor, what is it you have against him?"

She looked at me fixedly for a moment. "Have you met Nancy?"

"No."

She nodded knowingly. "That explains it. Nancy is only eighteen years old, Mr. Manning. Until she met Mel Traynor, she never even knew such men existed. Her father died when she was quite young, but I brought her up in a way that would have made him proud. You'll never know — *no* one will ever know — the sacrifices I've made, to make sure she grew into a proper young woman. . . . And then she met this Traynor person. . . ."

"I understand they plan to get married."

"That's ridiculous! Nancy is simply a young girl, an inexperienced girl, who has temporarily lost her head. Sooner or later she'll discover what a tragic mistake she's making even seeing Mel Traynor, and then she'll never have another thing to do with him or his kind ever again. . . . And besides, the man already has a wife. From what Nancy tells me, the wife is still in love with him. She probably wouldn't give him a divorce, no matter how much he was set on spoiling my daughter's life." She sighed. "Only God knows what power that man has over women. It must be almost hypnotic. Otherwise my Nancy would never have been blinded to what he is."

"Just what do you think he is, exactly, Mrs. Hammond?"

"Don't you know him?"

"Not too well," I said.

"I see. Well, he's a drunkard, for one thing. And he won't work. All he does is prey on women — in every way he can. That's the only thing he's good for — to ruin women's lives for them. You take Traynor's wife, for instance. Nancy tells me she's a beautiful woman, and still quite young. Since she left Traynor she's met a man — a very wealthy man, mind you — who wants her to get a divorce and marry him. But do you think she will? . . . No. She's so hypnotized by that worthless hulk that she's willing to throw her life away for him."

"Did Nancy tell you all this, Mrs. Hammond?"

"Yes. Nancy and I are very close. Oh, if she could only see what this insane affair is leading to!"

"Maybe —"

"He's hypnotized her, I tell you. Why, if I didn't know my Nancy so well I'd even be concerned about her honor. I'm sincere; I really would be."

I thought about Leda Traynor's account of being attacked by a naked Nancy Hammond in Traynor's apartment.

"Let me give you an example of what I mean," Mrs. Hammond said. "Just about two weeks ago Traynor and Mr. Shanley had a fight. They —"

"Mr. Shanley?"

"That's the gentleman who wants Mrs. Traynor to get a divorce and marry him. Carl Shanley."

I wrote the name down in my notebook. "All right, Mrs. Hammond," I said. "Go on."

"Well, as I say they had this fight. It was over Mrs. Traynor, of course. I wasn't there, but I'm sure it was all Mel Traynor's fault. At any rate, Mr. Shanley knocked him down. Oh, he wasn't hurt very much, and I'm sure Mr. Shanley wouldn't have hit him too hard, but you should have seen the way Nancy carried on. It was almost unbelievable. Here the man had received nothing more than a scratch, you might say, hardly hurt at all. But Nancy thought the world was coming to an end. She

even called an ambulance. Can you imagine? And for a week or ten days after that, there was no consoling her. She was sure the man had a fractured skull, or a concussion, or something like that. She simply worried herself sick."

"What else can you tell me about Mr. Shanley?" I asked.

"Very little, I'm afraid."

"You ever hear of Traynor having trouble with anyone else?"

"Other than with Mr. Shanley, you mean?"

"Yes."

She shook her head, and it seemed to me that she did it regretfully. "No," she said.

The hall door opened and a young girl came in. Like Mrs. Hammond, she had wide-set gray eyes, very full lips, and blonde hair. A real beauty, who resembled Mrs. Hammond so strongly that she might have been a younger sister.

Both Mrs. Hammond and I got to our feet.

The girl smiled at Mrs. Hammond and then at me.

"Nancy," Mrs. Hammond said, "this is Detective Manning. Mr. Manning, my daughter Nancy."

Nancy and I nodded to each other. She looked at me inquiringly as she slipped out of an old-fashioned raincoat, which seemed to be a size or so too large for her.

"Mr. Manning has been waiting for you, dear," Mrs. Hammond said. "He wants to ask you a few questions about Mel Traynor."

Nancy froze, one arm still in a sleeve of the raincoat, staring at me. "About Mel? What — what's happened to him?"

I crossed over to where she stood. "I wonder if I could talk to you privately, Miss Hammond?" I said.

She took a short step toward me. "I asked you a question. Why don't you answer me?"

"Perhaps I will," I said. "Where can we talk?"

Nancy hesitated for a moment, biting at her lower lip.

"Really, now," Mrs. Hammond said from across the room. "Isn't this just a bit highhanded, Mr. Manning?"

"I have a car downstairs," I said to Nancy. "Suppose we talk there."

She shrugged, slipped back into the raincoat, and we left the apartment. Neither of us said anything more until we were seated in the department sedan.

5.

The rain had slackened to a soft grey drizzle now. I offered Nancy Hammond a cigarette, which she refused, then lit one for myself and rolled the window down a few inches to let the smoke escape.

"What is it?" Nancy Hammond said. "For heaven's sake, tell me!"

"Things will go a little better if you let me ask the questions, Miss Hammond," I said.

"Oh? Well, just who are you to drag me out of my home and talk

to me this way? What gives you the right to ask me *anything*?"

"I'm a policeman," I said. "I don't like this any better than you do, but it's my job, and it has to be done. We can talk here, or we can talk down at the station house. It's up to you."

Her eyes flared angrily for an instant, but she said nothing at all.

"Your mother tells me you took in a movie this afternoon," I said.

"Did she?"

"A little cooperation will go a long way, Miss Hammond."

"Will it?"

I looked at her, then leaned forward to turn on the ignition. "As I said," I told her, "it's up to you. We'll talk at the station house."

"Oh, all right," she said, as if she were placating a very small boy. "Yes, I went to a movie. What about it?"

"What time did you go into the theater?"

"About one-thirty."

"You're sure?"

"Yes, of course."

"Anyone with you?"

"No."

"Your mother mentioned another girl."

"I was supposed to meet her out front, but she didn't show up."

"What theater did you go to?"

"The Beacon."

I didn't ask her what picture she'd seen. If it proved necessary to check out her alibi, the picture would be only one detail among many.

"You stayed for the complete show?" I asked.

"Yes." She spoke woodenly, as if she were determined to show no further emotion, or even interest.

"And then?"

"Then I went into a little bar near there and had a drink or so."

"Then?"

"Then I went to another place — Corcy's — and had dinner." She turned toward me suddenly. "The least you could do is tell me what I'm suspected of."

"I didn't say you were suspected of anything, Miss Hammond. I merely —"

"Mel!" she gasped. "Something's happened to him and you think that I . . . !" She grasped my arm with both hands. "What *is* it? What's happened to him?"

"What I said about the questions still goes, Miss Hammond," I said. "I'm sorry, but that's the way it'll have to be."

"But —"

"Is Mel Traynor your only boy friend, Miss Hammond?"

It took her a few moments to regain control of herself. Then I felt the pressure of her fingers on my arm relax and she drew as far away from me as she could get.

"We're going to get married," she said. "Does that answer your question?"

"Not entirely. Girls have been known to have friends other than the man they intend to marry."

"The only other man I ever see

at all is Bill Kelbert. And I wouldn't see even him if Mother didn't insist on it."

"Does Traynor know about this Bill Kelbert?"

"Of course. I tell him everything."

"And he doesn't mind?"

"Do you think I'd see him against Mel's wishes? He doesn't mind because he knows I see Bill just to pacify Mother. Mother wants me to marry Bill."

"I see. . . . Does Bill know about Traynor?"

"Certainly."

"How does he feel about it?"

"What does it matter how he feels? He's a very wealthy man. He could have almost any girl he wanted."

I got out my notebook again. "What's Bill's address, Miss Hammond?"

She gave it to me and I wrote it down.

"I guess that'll be all for right now," I said. "Thanks very much, Miss Hammond."

There was a long moment when neither of us spoke; then Nancy opened the door on her side, glaring back at me over her shoulder.

"And to hell with you, too," she said. She jumped out of the car and slammed the door shut so hard that I wondered why the glass didn't shatter.

I watched her running back to her apartment house, the raincoat flapping against the backs of her legs, and then I started the motor

and headed for Mel Traynor's brownstone.

6.

The apartment was filled with police brass, reporters, and men from the D.A.'s office. I called Walt Logan outside to talk to him.

"How'd you make out?" Walt asked.

"Traynor could pick the hard ones," I said. "If you think his wife's cool, you should see his girl friend."

"Maybe they weren't so hard and cool where he was concerned," Walt said. "You get any leads?"

"A couple. Mrs. Traynor had some guy pretty hot after her. A man named Carl Shanley. Seems he wanted her to get a divorce and marry him. She do any talking after I left, Walt?"

"Not a word. Cool — like you said."

"Well, this guy Shanley and her husband had a fight. She didn't mention it to me, probably because she was trying to protect Shanley. That's lead number one."

"What's the other one?"

"Somebody named William Kelbert. A very wealthy guy, I understand. He wanted Nancy Hammond, but she didn't want him. It looks like Mel Traynor really had it for the ladies, Walt. Once he got them, he had them for keeps."

"This is the kind of case that'll spread out all over the place," Walt

said. "The techs haven't come up with a single good print. Funny, how you hardly ever get good ones. All they've been able to lift are partials."

"The D.A.'s men giving you a bad time?"

"Not yet."

"Well, there's no point in both of us hanging around here. I want to talk to Shanley and Kelbert. Especially Mr. Shanley."

"He's the one that had the fight with Traynor, right?"

"Yes."

"You want me to keep Mrs. Traynor here?"

"Yes. At least until she starts to balk. Holding her wouldn't be worth the trouble it would cost us; and besides, we can pick her up again fast enough."

Walt nodded. "Give me a call if you get anything. I've got a hunch we'll be around here quite a while."

7.

I drove back to the station house, spent ten minutes briefing the squad commander, and went to work.

I called BCI again and asked for run-throughs on Carl Shanley and William Kelbert. Then, while I waited for BCI, I called Bellevue and asked to speak to the assistant M.E. who was performing the autopsy on Mel Traynor's body. The assistant M.E. told me he had proceeded far enough to confirm his theory that Traynor had been

killed by a single blow to the back of the head, but that nothing could be considered official until after the autopsy had been completed. The autopsy itself would take another hour or so, and the toxicological examinations would probably take at least another twenty-four hours. So far, the only statement the toxicologists could make with certainty was that Mel Traynor, at the time of his murder, had been completely sober. There had been no trace of alcohol in his blood at all. Later examinations would determine the presence or absence of drugs or poisons.

I hung up, typed out reports of my findings, and prepared a folder to hold the flood of subsequent reports, statements, miscellaneous documents and so on which would result from the investigation.

I'd just placed the folder in file when BCI called to say that William Kelbert had checked out clean but that Carl Shanley — Mrs. Traynor's boy friend — had a record. He had been arrested for assault twice, once in 1951 and again in 1954. In both instances he had seriously injured men with his fists, and both of his victims had had to be hospitalized. Both men had sworn that Shanley had attacked them without provocation. Shanley, on his part, had sworn that the men had made slurring references to the woman he happened to be escorting at the time. The women, in both cases, had denied this. Shanley had drawn

a fine and a suspended sentence in the first case; in the second, the charge had been dropped because the complainant had left the country before Shanley could be prosecuted.

I decided Shanley might be a very good man to talk to, and went to see him. He shared an apartment with another man on East Sixty-fourth Street. His roommate told me that Shanley had not gone to his office that day, saying he was sick with a hangover, and had left the apartment about noon. He hadn't told his roommate where he was going, and he hadn't returned. The roommate told me of two places where Shanley sometimes went to cure his hangovers, and gave me a complete physical description of him. I checked both bars. Shanley had been in neither place. This, the barmen told me, was unusual, because Shanley seldom missed a day spending an hour or so in each place. I then called Communications and asked that an alarm be got out for him.

I drew another blank with William Kelbert, the man whom Nancy Hammond had jilted for Mel Traynor. Kelbert lived at an exclusive club on East Fiftieth, but he had not been seen since shortly after breakfast. He had asked one of the employees at the club to check plane schedules to St. Louis, but had changed his mind before the employee could follow through. A few minutes later he had asked the same

employee to get him one orchestra ticket for a Broadway show that night, and had then left the club. He was in the habit of leaving telephone numbers where he might be reached, but today he had neglected to do that.

I called BCI once more and asked for an alarm on Kelbert. Then I called Walt Logan to see if there had been any developments at Mel Traynor's apartment. There had not been. Everyone except Walt, Mrs. Traynor, and two uniform men had left. I told Walt to leave one of the uniform men as a stakeout, take Mrs. Traynor home, with a strong suggestion that she stay there until she heard from us, and then meet me at the squad room.

8.

Walt arrived about thirty minutes later. It was then half past eleven.

"We're going to have to drag in some more men on this, Walt," I said. I told him about having put out alarms for Shanley and Kelbert and that, so far, they hadn't been picked up. "We've got some likely suspects, and that's all. We haven't got a damned thing on any one of them."

"And no prints," Walt said. "No prints, and no clues whatever. A sweet little case, Steve, no kidding."

"We've got to start the old leg work," I said. "We'll ask Headquarters for a dozen men, to start with. If that doesn't do it, we'll get some

more. We've got to requestion everybody in that apartment house, and everyone else around there who might have seen someone go in or out. And we'd better send some men around to the cab companies to check their trip sheets. That's a tough job, but it'll have to be done. We'll have to check out every pickup or discharge made within a block of that address between, say, noon and four-fifteen. If we still don't get anywhere, we'll have to start questioning everybody Mel Traynor knew."

By the time I had called Headquarters for additional detectives and given assignments to each of them, it was after one o'clock in the morning. We worked steadily throughout the night, and at day-break we were no further along, so far as clues were concerned, than we had been when we began. I had staked out patrolmen at Carl Shanley's apartment and William Kelbert's club, but neither man had returned. I had also checked with the airlines to see whether Kelbert had carried through on his trip to St. Louis. There was no record of a reservation or the purchase of a ticket.

At seven-ten, I received word that William Kelbert had called his club from Philadelphia, asking that some papers be forwarded to him there. I long-distanced the Philadelphia police, who were able in a short time to establish the fact that Kelbert had gone to Philadelphia by train to

wind up a business matter, but had become so involved that he had spent the day there and stayed overnight to complete the transaction this morning. During the time of the murder, Kelbert had been in the company of four other men.

At a few minutes past ten, we got a call from one of the detectives who were checking the cab drivers' trip sheets. I wrote down the information he gave me, then hung up and grinned at Walt Logan.

"You can say all you want about scientific police investigation, Walt, but there's nothing will ever replace routine."

Walt came over and leaned up against the edge of my desk. "What've we got?"

"A cab driver with a good memory," I said, handing Walt the note I'd made. "Let's go talk to him."

9.

We needed to talk to the driver only a few minutes before we knew we were on the right track. We took the driver with us to the Ansonia post office sub-station, where he had picked up the fare he drove to the corner of 72nd Street and Central Park West the previous afternoon at 2:15. We talked with several people at the post office, and then — still in company with the cab driver — drove to the apartment Nancy Hammond shared with her mother.

We arrived there at noon. Mrs. Hammond let us in, glanced ques-

tioningly at the cab driver in his cap and leather jacket, and then turned to me.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but Nancy isn't home. You'll have to come back later."

"It isn't Nancy we want to see, Mrs. Hammond," I said.

She frowned. "Oh?"

I looked at the cab driver. "How about it, Mr. Laney?"

"This is the lady, chief," he said firmly. "I'd swear to it."

"Thank you very much," I said. "You can go back to work now, if you like. We'll let you know when we want you."

"Just say the word, chief," he said. He turned and left the apartment.

"Just what is this?" Mrs. Hammond asked. "Who was that man?"

I closed the front door and motioned toward the sofa. "Maybe you'd like to sit down, Mrs. Hammond. My partner and I —"

"Aren't you a little confused?" she said. "Asking *me* to sit down, indeed. . . . This is my home, not yours."

"You asked who that man was," I said. He's a cab driver, Mrs. Hammond. You don't seem to remember him, but he remembers you very well. He's the man who drove you from the post office to Mel Traynor's apartment house."

She stared at me for what seemed like fully half a minute, then looked at Walt. "What is he talking about?"

"He'll tell you," Walt said.

"You drew out twelve hundred

dollars of your postal savings yesterday afternoon, Mrs. Hammond," I said. "Why?"

"That's none of your business."

"I'm afraid it is."

Mrs. Hammond started to say something, then broke off suddenly, frowning toward the draped archway that separated the living room from the rest of the apartment. "Nancy! I told you to stay in your room."

Nancy walked slowly into the living room, looking at her mother searchingly. There was a tense alertness about her movements and her gray eyes were bright and slightly narrowed. She ignored Walt and me completely.

"May we see your raincoat, Mrs. Hammond?" I asked.

"My — raincoat?" She glanced furtively at Nancy, then back at me.

"Yes, please," I said. "The one you were wearing yesterday afternoon. The one with the plaid trim around the collar and the bad tear in the left sleeve."

"You — you must be insane. I have no such coat."

"No," Nancy Hammond said softly, almost inaudibly. "But I have." She walked toward her mother with a slow, pacing stride. "Mother, did you —"

"Nancy!" Mrs. Hammond said.

Nancy turned to look at me, very slowly, moving only the upper part of her body. "I borrowed her raincoat when I went to the movie yesterday," she said. "I'd torn my

own coat and I hadn't had a chance to get it repaired."

"Is that the way it was, Mrs. Hammond?" Walt Logan asked. "Did you have to wear Nancy's torn coat over to Mel Traynor's place, because Nancy had borrowed your own?"

There was a long silence. Then I said, "You replaced that money in your postal savings account this morning, Mrs. Hammond. My partner and I would like to know why you would take it out just a few minutes before Mel Traynor was murdered and then —"

"I'll tell you why," Nancy Hammond said. "I know damn well why she did."

"Nan —" her mother began.

"She took it out to bribe Mel with, that's what she did. She'd told me a hundred times that she could buy Mel off. She —"

Mrs. Hammond stared up at her daughter, her eyes rounded incredulously. "I've given my whole life to you. . . . And now you . . ."

Nancy raised both hands level with her shoulders, the fingers clawed, her whole body trembling. "You killed him!" she screamed. "You *killed* him!"

Mrs. Hammond cringed back from her. "But I *had* to. Don't you see? I had to protect you."

I had edged my way toward the two women slowly, and now, as Nancy's fingernails raked toward Mrs. Hammond's face, I brought my right forearm up swiftly and knocked

the clawed fingers away. She struggled with me for a moment, then sank down on the sofa beside her mother. She stared straight ahead of her, crying soundlessly.

Mrs. Hammond stood up. "I had every justification," she said. "Mel Traynor was going to ruin my daughter's life. She could have married a decent young man who could have taken care of her properly, but Traynor was going to destroy all that. All my life I've worked and sacrificed for Nancy — I had no intention of letting that work and sacrifice go for nothing, just because a silly young girl and a drunken wretch like Traynor couldn't think clearly."

"Perhaps you'd rather wait till we get to the station house," I said. "We'll call in a stenographer and —"

She went on as if she hadn't heard me. "After Nancy went to the movie yesterday, I got to thinking about things. I knew they couldn't go on much longer, and I decided to talk to Traynor while I had the chance. I took that money out of postal savings to bribe him with. It was raining, and I took a cab from the post office to his apartment house."

She paused for a moment to glance down at her daughter. "Traynor laughed at me. He just stood there, fooling with that little camera, and laughing at me. He said that he and Nancy were in love and that they were going to get married, and that there was nothing anyone in the world could do to stop them.

I took the money out of my purse and offered it to him. He became abusive. I thought he was actually going to strike me. He told me to get out. When I refused, he insulted me and Nancy. He said that I didn't care anything about Nancy's happiness — that all I cared about was my own welfare. He — he actually said that I was trying to auction Nancy off to the highest bidder — that I wasn't any better than a . . . a madam trying to get the best price she could for a girl. He said I was even worse than that because it was my own daughter I was trying to sell."

"Mrs. Hammond," I said. "I think we'd better —"

"And then he put the camera down on that table by the door and started to jerk the door open and put me out. . . . That's when I grabbed up the camera and hit him. He was facing away from me, and I caught the long shoulder strap in my hand and swung it as hard as I

could." She shook her head slowly and her voice took on a tone of wonder. "How could he have said such a thing? How could he even have *thought* such a thing? It proves how rotten he was. If he hadn't been completely rotten, would he ever had said that about my trying to sell my own daughter for the highest price I could get? Can you even imagine a man saying anything like that to a mother like me?"

I looked at Walt Logan, then walked to the telephone and lifted the receiver.

"See Mrs. Hammond down to the car, Walt," I said. "I'll be along in a moment, just as soon as I call Headquarters and ask them to cancel that alarm for Carl Shanley."

"Can you imagine a man saying anything like that to me?" Mrs. Hammond said to Walt. "Can you?"

Walt took her arm gently and nodded toward the door.

"We'll have to leave now, Mrs. Hammond," he said.





Field of Honor

"You started it," Jill told herself, "and you've got to finish it. Even if you get killed doing it . . ."

BY ROBERT TURNER

SHE WAS SICK to her stomach twice late that afternoon and then she was over it; she was all right again. She just told herself: Look, you were crazy enough to start the thing, showing off, now you got to settle

it the way Roxanne called it. You fluke out, you'll never live it down. It'll be all over school, Monday.

She ate little dinner that night, of course, and she was awfully pale but her mother didn't pay too much attention. Her mother was preoccupied with getting the house cleaned and prettied for the bridge club

coming there that night and she was obviously peeved because Jill hadn't pitched in to help her.

All her mother said, was, during dinner: "I swear, Jill, you look peaked tonight, and what in the world's happened to your appetite? I hope you're not coming down sick with something, tonight of all nights, for pity's sake." Her mother frowned with concern but Jill knew it was concern for her bridge club plans, not for her.

"No, I'm all right," she said.

Her mother laughed, relieved. "Oh, just the whim-whams, eh? Girls your age will get them, I know."

Jill didn't answer. She got up and left the table, softly, politely saying, "Excuse me," and went into the kitchen. Her father was away on one of his perpetual business trips and her mother was still feeding her face so Jill wasn't particularly stealthy about taking the two beer can openers from a kitchen drawer. She didn't look at them but on her way upstairs to her own room she felt the hand holding them get hot and slick with sweat.

She took off the skirt and sweater she'd worn to the movies that afternoon, where the argument started. She showered and dressed carefully in clean bra, panties and slip, then put on a soft, frilly cotton summer dress. She combed her long hair tightly back from her forehead and into a pony tail. Then she changed her mind, looking into the mirror.

That would be too easy to grab hold of. Instead she coiled the pony tail into a tight neck bun. Then she got out her blue jeans and matching shirt and rolled them tightly, with the two beer can openers inside them and put the whole bundle into a brown paper sack.

Downstairs again, her mother was setting out the good china on the buffet and only looked up once, quickly at her daughter. She said, absently: "Where you going tonight, Jill?"

"Youth Center," Jill said. "A dance or something."

"That's nice," her mother said. "Don't get into mischief. I'm so thankful they have a nice place in town for young folks so parents don't have to worry where they are. What have you got in the bag, dear?"

"Blue jeans. I — there may be a softball game before the dance. It stays light quite late these days."

"I know." Her mother sighed. "Don't remind me. Summer's almost here and before I know it I'll have you on my hands all day long, day in, day out, mooning around the house. What does a body do with a girl fourteen, these days? I don't know. Nothing seems to interest you. Well, I — What in the world you insist on wearing your hair so *severe* for, child? Makes you look like a hoyden. Oh, well, the style, I suppose. You teen-agers."

"I won't be very late," Jill said and went out.

She walked three blocks down the tree-lined, lawn-cooled street, peaceful and quiet in the rosy pre-dusk of this late May evening, to the home of her friend, Thelma. Thelma was ready and waiting on the front porch.

Away from the house, Thelma said: "I didn't think you really had the guts, Jill. I figured you'd chicken out. You got the church keys? I brought a couple in case you forgot." Her voice was thick with excitement.

"I got 'em." Jill was surprised at how low and steady her voice was. But there was a hurting when she swallowed, like with a sore throat.

"You scared, honey?" Thelma said.

Jill looked sideways at Thelma. Thelma didn't look sleepy and bored the way she usually looked. Her dark thin face was all flushed around her high cheek bones. Jill saw how heavily Thelma was made-up and said:

"I better paint up some more. I don't dare do it right before I leave the house. The old lady'd raise hell."

She stopped and applied rouge and lipstick and eye-shadow until she was made-up almost to the point of grotesqueness. Then she turned to Thelma. "How do I look?"

"Better, kid. You were a little pale. I asked you, you scared?"

"Sure, I'm scared." Jill lifted her round little chin. "Don't worry about it. I'll be all right."

"Sure you will," Thelma said.

"You'll fix that Roxanne bitch. She's been asking for it. Maybe we aren't full-time Butches like her but we ain't a bunch of Marges, either, just because we live on the right side of town. Listen, I forgot to tell you. Johnny and some guys got a car. They're going to be there. They're going to date whoever wins tonight."

"They are?" Jill had trouble controlling her stomach for a moment and she got all dizzy, thinking about Johnny being there. God, Johnny, with those bold, crazy dark eyes and the tough little crooked grin; Johnny almost twenty years old. Now, she'd *have* to do this right, show Johnny she could settle an argument as good as Roxanne and her bunch. Show him she was all woman, too, even though she was a year younger than Roxanne.

The girls didn't talk much after that. They were over into the business section of town, now. Once, Thelma said: "This stinking town! Can't even wear blue jeans on the street any more without the lousy cops picking on you. Who do they think they are?"

"Well, they know what it means," Jill said. "After they caught Sylvia and Vi and them over in Trinity church yard a couple weeks ago. What do you expect?"

It was now almost dusk. They approached the Central Junior High athletic field from the west side, where there weren't any houses and entered through a gate that was

only secured with a piece of wire. Inside the field they walked toward the bleacher stands and the concrete field equipment storage house at one end, where shadows were already full so that anybody hanging around couldn't be seen from the street. Jill and Thelma were almost right up to the field house before they saw that Roxanne and Nita were already there. And the boys.

Jill couldn't see who the boys were, but she could see their white shoes gleaming in the gloom. It looked as though there were three of them.

Roxanne and Nita already had their blue jeans on. They said nothing to Jill and Thelma, neither did the boys speak. Jill looked at Roxanne once and saw Roxanne grinning that bigmouthed grin of hers; Roxanne big and too busty and with her great thick thighs straining the legs of the tight blue jeans. Then Jill turned away.

She went behind the field house into the dark and put on her outfit. She was trembling now, although no night wind had yet sprung up and it was still warm. She was shivering and yet she was all hot and sweaty.

Thelma handed her the two beer can openers and said: "Remember, now, go for her breasts. That hurts awful, they say, and you get her there once, good, and it'll be over. Make sure you keep your own protected, though."

Jill shook her head. She couldn't speak. After she walked a few steps

she was surprised, though, that some of the weakness had gone from her legs. Now that the time had come, she no longer even thought about running, either. She looked once at the boys, three of them and one of them Johnny, *Johnny*, sitting on a pile of hurdles and then she looked away. The boys weren't talking. They were just sitting, watching the girls and smoking cigarettes held in cupped hands.

Jill and Thelma walked over to Roxanne and Nita, who came half way to meet them. Nita, small, thin and sharp-faced, looked more twelve than fifteen, even with all that heavy make-up. She said, shrilly: "All right, you two. Remember, keep away from the face. We don't want anything showing for anybody asking silly questions after it's over. You both ready?"

Jill shook her head. Nita and Thelma backed off and she and Roxanne were there facing each other and she saw the glint of pale light on the beer can openers in Roxanne's hand and to Jill it was suddenly as though the two of them were all alone, miles from anywhere and there was nobody else in the whole wide world.

They circled warily and then Roxanne flung up her arm and made a lunge. Jill dodged but the church key in Roxanne's right hand clawed across the back of the hand Jill had brought up to protect her chest. She looked down at the thin ragged line of blood and then the

pain of it came and right after that a great filling and bursting with anger as though everything in her was exploding.

She looked up in time to see Roxanne lurching forward again, the glittering beer can opener raised for a sidearm swipe. And Jill wasn't even thinking now. She just wanted to cut and mar. All the hurt and frustration in her gathered and struck out. She saw and felt the thing in her hand rake Roxanne's fat full cheek and was surprised and at the same time exhilarated beyond belief. She heard someone, probably Nita, shout: "No fair! She broke the rule; she did the face! Go get her for that, Roxy!"

Roxanne fell back and touched her cheek and looked down at the smear on her hand. Then she threw one of the beer can openers away and cursing, came at Jill. She caught Jill by surprise and hit her in the face twice with her free fist before Jill struck with a beer opener and saw it rip through Roxanne's shirt front, exposing a flash of white and then wet and shiny red flesh.

Then Roxanne grabbed her and tied up her arms. Jill had never felt such furious strength. Roxanne's ankle got behind hers. She was thrown flat to the ground so hard her breath was knocked out. She knew Roxanne was straddling her now and she felt something clawing at her face but she couldn't do anything about it. She couldn't breathe and she wanted to be sick.

Through a fog she finally saw the other two girls and two of the boys dragging a fighting, swearing Roxanne off of her. It wasn't until she got weakly to her feet that she realized blood was trickling down her throat, half gagging her and that she could not see anything but a red haze out of one eye.

With the other eye she saw Roxanne, calmer now, but still breathing heavily, and the others, staring at her with the strangest look she'd ever seen. One of the boys, not Johnny, kept saying "Jesus Christ!" over and over.

Then Jill put her hand to her right eye and there was something there so horrible to touch she had to pull her hand quickly away. When she knew what it was, she felt everything start to go away from her. At the same time she heard Johnny say, sweet Johnny, good Johnny: "We better get her to a hospital, for God's sake!"

"No, no, you jerk," she heard Nita say, then. "And get us all jammed-up, answering a million questions? Take her home and let *them* worry about her. She won't talk. She'd better not, anyhow."

Just as she fainted Jill heard herself whisper: "Don't worry, I won't squeal." Or at least she thought she did.

They carried her home in the boys' car and it was quite dark when they reached Jill's street. They coasted to a stop in front of her house, with no lights on the car.

They carried her up onto the big square of well kept lawn and dropped her in the shadow of a lilac bush. Then they ran back to the car, not caring about being quiet anymore. The car doors slammed. A long blast was blown on the horn and the car squirted off, double-duals roaring.

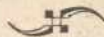
Inside the house Jill's mother and the rest of the women, including Thelma's mother, stopped playing bridge at the car sounds. One of them said: "Where'd that car come from? I didn't hear it stop."

Jill's mother sighed. "Probably my daughter home early. She *would*. If I wanted her home early she'd be especially late just to fret me. I swear these youngsters have no consideration. She *knew* I had the club here tonight. Well, she can just go up to her room and stay there. After she's had some cookies. I can't be that mean." She started dealing a new hand.

A few moments later there was a scratching at the front door like the sound of an animal wanting to be let in. Jill's mother and the other women tried to ignore it but then Jill's mother flung down her cards, exasperatedly. She got up and minced to the front door, muttering:

"I declare, the silly games they sometimes decide to play — trying to frighten me or something. If she's forgot her key why doesn't she knock or ring the bell like any sensible person?"

She opened the door just as Jill was about to scratch on it again with the beer can opener that she hadn't dropped all this time. For a second Jill's mother looked right over her daughter, lying there. For another second she looked down at the red-masked object with something horrible where one of the eyes should have been, before she knew what or who it was.



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Sales Resistance

*A True Story From
Actual Case Records*

IT WAS a clever, workable idea that the three killers had. Except for one little thing, it might have resulted in a perfect crime.

Unfortunately, the victim had a tremendous amount of sales resistance.

It all started one gloomy night in a Bronx tavern. The proprietor, a little, graying man named Tony Marino, needed more money. His friend and unofficial bouncer, Daniel Murphy (called "Red" because of

his flaming hair), didn't get paid so long as Tony was in need of cash; there just wasn't anything on hand to pay him with. And the local undertaker, Frank Pasqua, a habitué of the tavern, started complaining that he wasn't getting enough business.

Out of the three complaints several ideas emerged. The first was Pasqua's: "Let's start a plague or something." But this was rejected as unworkable. The second idea was better.

Michael Malloy, an ancient drunk, was



*Michael Malloy was as good as dead, the killers decided.
Then they discovered that they couldn't kill Malloy.*

BY

ANDREW J. BURRIS

one of Tony Marino's crosses. Malloy was living on credit in every bar in town, and used to trade small services for the privilege of sleeping on the floor of Tony's place and others. With business as bad as it was for Tony, the few extra drinks that Malloy managed to wheedle out of him and "Red" Murphy hurt. If Malloy could be killed, they'd be rid of the annoyance, and Frank Pasqua would have another body to bury.

But Malloy had neither money nor solvent relatives. He didn't have any relatives at all, as a matter of fact. Killing Malloy was a good idea, but where was the profit going to come from?

An unscrupulous insurance agent who came into the bar one day gave them the answer to that. They took out a policy on Malloy's life, naming Tony Marino beneficiary. The agent didn't care whether or not Malloy ever saw the policy, much less signed it, so long as he collected his premium. Frank Pasqua put up the premium, and was guaranteed in return that he could bury Malloy — funeral expenses to come out of the insurance money, which Tony and Red would split.

Everything was arranged. All they had to do was kill Malloy.

They didn't want to be obvious about it, so they just mixed some anti-freeze with Malloy's liquor the next time he came in. It took five doctored shots to knock Malloy out. Pasqua took the stiff body into the

back room and watched over it. After ten minutes, he came out.

"Malloy just opened his eyes," Pasqua reported. He's okay."

During the next week or so, the three plotters filled Malloy with enough wood alcohol anti-freeze to float a truck. It had no effect on Malloy. Years of drinking had given him an unlimited resistance to any kind of alcohol, in any form.

"We got to try something else," Tony Marino decided. So they purchased a can of sardines. "Ptomaine poisoning," Marino explained. "Just like natural death." They opened the can and waited a week, until the smell of the sardines was overpowering. Then they chopped up the sardine can and added the bits of tin to the putrefied sardines. Marino made the mess into a sandwich and fed it to Malloy that night.

Neither ptomaine poisoning nor internal bleeding (from the tin) got to Malloy. No one knows why — but Malloy just went on eating and drinking.

Another premium on the life insurance was coming due soon. Something had to be done, and quick. Wood alcohol was tried again, and then wood alcohol mixed with oysters, on the theory (proposed by Pasqua, who was obviously getting desperate) that the alcohol would turn the oysters to stone in Malloy's stomach and kill him.

No dice.

Finally, as January crept around, Tony Marino had a bright idea.

"We'll take him out to the park and strip him to the waist. Then we'll pour cold water over him. He'll catch pneumonia and die."

The net result of this procedure was that Pasqua caught a cold and Tony Marino had the flu. Malloy, however, was just fine, thanks.

By this time Pasqua was being pursued by creditors. Tony Marino and Red Murphy were rapidly going broke. Something drastic had to be done.

Tony knew a friendly cab driver who agreed to take Malloy out to a deserted spot and run over him. The cab driver wanted some cash in advance — further depleting the slim resources of the plotters — but the method looked certain. They paid the cabbie and sent him off with the indestructible Malloy.

The cabbie came back. "Job's done," he reported. He'd run over Malloy not once, but twice. Then he'd left the iron man lying in the street, bleeding profusely.

Next day, the plotter consulted the papers eagerly. No news of Malloy. No unidentified man being run over in the Bronx. And that state of no news went on for seven long days. A check of the hospitals didn't turn up a live Malloy, either.

But in seven days Marino, Murphy and Pasqua found out what had happened. Malloy came walking into the tavern.

"What happened to you?" some-

body managed to gasp.

"Oh, I got a little banged up somehow," Malloy said. "But I'm okay now, thanks."

By now everybody was discouraged. They decided on one last try. They poured enough wood alcohol into Malloy to knock him out. Then they put a hose in his mouth and pumped gas through the other end of the hose.

That, at last, did the trick. Malloy was definitely dead.

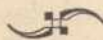
Pasqua had a doctor friend who was convinced to sign a death certificate listing pneumonia as the cause of Malloy's demise. Pasqua buried the little Irishman. The insurance company paid off without question.

But there were just too many murderers. Pasqua and Red Murphy let a few details slip, and the fantastic plot to kill Michael Malloy reached the ears of the police. When the police found that Malloy was really dead, they had the body exhumed.

Unfortunately, pneumonia does not turn a body bright red. Gas poisoning does. The police confronted the plotters with this fact, and they started implicating each other in an immediate frenzy of panic.

All three were sentenced to death in Sing Sing. The helpful cabbie got off with a long prison term.

And Marino, Murphy and Frank Pasqua died in the electric chair — the *first* time.

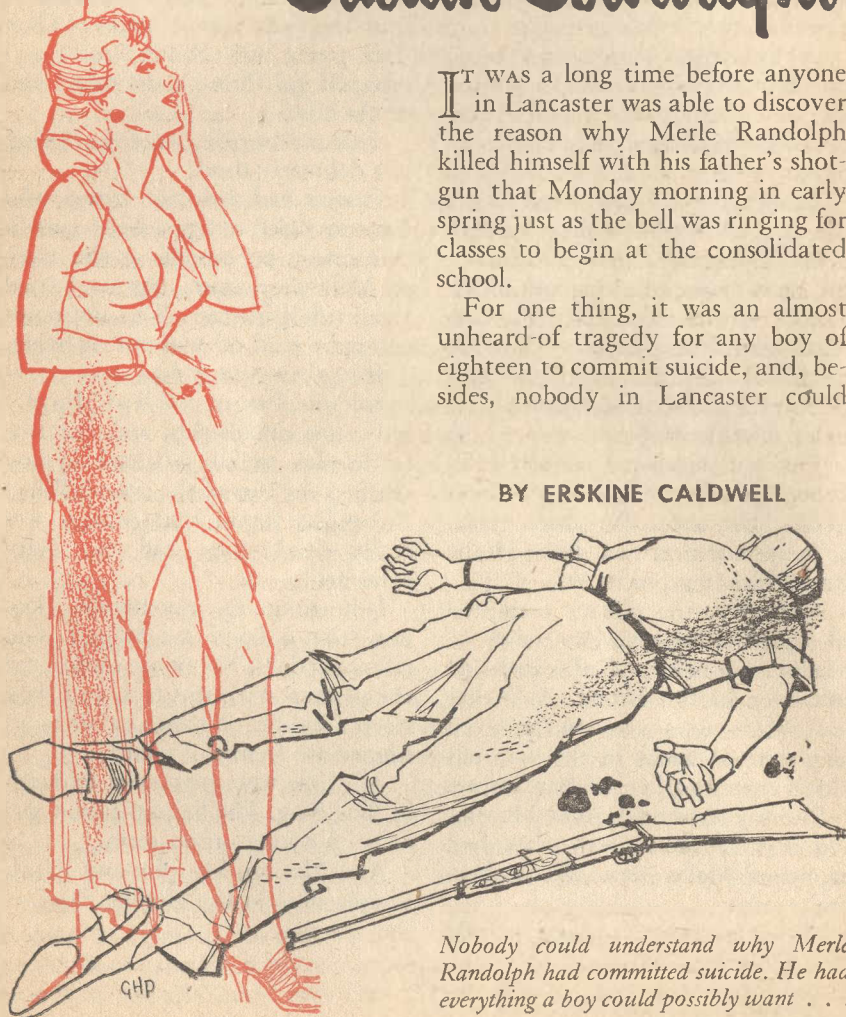


In Memory of Judith Courtright

IT WAS a long time before anyone in Lancaster was able to discover the reason why Merle Randolph killed himself with his father's shotgun that Monday morning in early spring just as the bell was ringing for classes to begin at the consolidated school.

For one thing, it was an almost unheard-of tragedy for any boy of eighteen to commit suicide, and, besides, nobody in Lancaster could

BY ERSKINE CALDWELL



Nobody could understand why Merle Randolph had committed suicide. He had everything a boy could possibly want . . .

think of the slightest motive that would induce a boy like Merle Randolph to take his own life.

Merle's mother, Sarah Randolph, heard the blast of the shotgun a few minutes after Merle finished eating breakfast and left for school, but she paid little or no attention to it at the time, because several of the neighbors had recently become interested in marksmanship and were frequently firing shotguns, rifles, and pistols at tin cans and other targets.

However, as it happened, when Merle's father, George Randolph, as he had been in the habit of doing for many years, came home from the hardware store at noon to eat lunch, Sarah remembered having heard the sound of the shot and she told George that the more she thought about it the stranger it seemed that anybody would be target-practicing so early in the morning. When George finished eating, he left the house and walked across the backyard to the rear of the garage. That was when it was first known that Merle Randolph had killed himself.

It was Merle's senior year in high school and, besides having satisfactory grades in all of his studies, he had been the leading scorer and star player on the basketball team for the past two years. The basketball season had closed on Saturday night of the previous week when Lancaster High played a winning game — the score was 72 to 64 — against one of the high school teams in New Orleans.

Naturally, everybody in Lancaster had been highly elated by the result, and even the New Orleans newspapers had praised the Lancaster team for being successful against a high school that had an enrollment ten times larger than Lancaster's. Lancaster was a small town of about four thousand population in an agricultural and lumbering community and was situated in the piney-woods region of the coastal plain about sixty-five miles north-east of New Orleans. The consolidated school in Lancaster had an enrollment of approximately three hundred boys and girls in the primary and grammar school grades and about a hundred and fifty students in the high school.

When the Lancaster school opened during the first week of the previous September, there were two new teachers on the faculty. One of the new teachers was Eve Grayson, who taught the first grade, and the other one was Judith Courtright, who was in charge of the kindergarten.

Eve and Judith had graduated from the state teachers' college, where they had been roommates for two years, and it had long been their ambition to begin their teaching careers in the same school. They had been very pleased and happy when they were notified shortly after graduation that their applications had been approved and accepted by the Lancaster school

board and that arrangements would be made for them to share a small apartment in a private home during the school year. The letter each of them received was signed by George Randolph, who was president of the school board.

Unlike Judith, who was a reserved, soft-spoken, dark-haired girl, Eve Grayson was vivacious, care-free, impulsive, and brightly blonde-haired. She was twenty-one at that time, a year younger than Judith, and she had been very popular with numerous young men, as well as with several of the unmarried instructors, throughout her four years in college. It was not unusual, then, for Eve to be upset and exceedingly unhappy when she came to Lancaster and was confronted by the fact that it was a policy of the school board to make a pointed request of all unmarried teachers that they have dates only on weekends and not during the school week.

Eve rebelled at once by going out in public on a Tuesday night with a young bank clerk, and two days later she received a firmly-worded reminder from the school board that her services would not be required in the future if she did not respect the board's request. The final paragraph of the letter explained that the board felt that teachers would not set a good example to the students if they engaged in frivolous activities during the evening hours of the school week. That was how it happened that Eve Grayson resigned

from her teaching position at the end of the first week of the term. She left immediately on a bus for New Orleans.

Judith was unhappy about what had happened, because she and Eve had been such close friends for the past two years, but she knew it was useless to argue with anyone as headstrong and impetuous as Eve Grayson. Eve had tried to persuade Judith to resign and go to New Orleans with her, but Judith looked forward to a career of teaching and she wanted to be successful from the beginning, especially since she was not engaged to be married and fully expected to teach school for many years.

However, she wanted to keep Eve Grayson's friendship, and she promised to visit Eve in New Orleans on many weekends during the remainder of the school year. When Judith questioned her about the kind of job she could get in New Orleans in order to support herself, Eve laughed and told her not to worry about that. She reminded Judith that she had been to New Orleans several times during summer vacations and that she knew her way around.

During the fall term of school, Judith met several young men of the town, and she had an occasional date on weekends with some of them. However, none of the men she met in Lancaster impressed her seriously and she had no thoughts of marriage. She spent the Christmas

holidays with her parents in the northern part of the state, where her father owned a drug store, even though in letter after letter Eve Grayson had urged and begged her to come to New Orleans for the holidays, promising that she would meet many interesting men while she was there.

Each time Judith answered one of Eve's letters, she always promised that she would come to New Orleans soon for a weekend visit. Eve wrote to her in detail about the comfortable apartment she had rented, describing the furnishings of the two bedrooms and the large parlor, and always ended her letters by begging Judith to share it with her. She still had not told Judith what kind of job she had or about the work she was doing, even though Judith continued to ask her about it nearly every time she wrote.

When Judith came back to Lancaster at the end of the Christmas holidays, she was met at the train by Merle Randolph.

With a shy boyish grin, and trying manfully to hide the blush on his cheeks, Merle came up to her at the railroad station and said that he had his father's automobile and that he had come to take her to the house where she had her small apartment. As she got into the sedan, she was thinking that Merle's father had sent him — and probably after much protest on Merle's part — to meet her and help her with her baggage, and that it was merely a courtesy to

her from the president of the school board.

While they were driving through town, Judith tried several times to get Merle to talk to her, but he was noticeably shy and embarrassed in her presence and he answered all of her questions by nervously nodding or shaking his head.

Finally, though, when they reached the house where she lived, and with an abrupt and unexpected boldness, Merle stopped the car and gripped her hands before she could open the door and get out. Catching her breath, Judith looked at him in surprise.

"Miss Courtright —" Merle said excitedly, his voice quavering. "Miss Courtright —"

His whole face was flushed by that time and she could feel the violent trembling of his hands.

"What is it, Merle?" Judith asked as calmly as she could. She had seen him glance shyly at her a number of times at school, and somehow she had been aware that frequently he was watching her from a distance while she was on the playground with her kindergarten class. There was the time, too, when she was walking home late one afternoon and suddenly had the feeling that Merle Randolph was following her, but when she looked back over her shoulder, there was no one within sight. "Tell me what it is, Merle," she said after that, looking directly at him.

"Miss Courtright — I want to ask

you something —" he said hesitantly.

"What is it you want to ask me, Merle?"

"Miss Courtright — I want to see you —" he said, quickly averting his eyes. "Will you let me — Miss Courtright — will you?"

"Of course, Merle," she said, smiling a little. "You're seeing me right now."

"I don't mean like this — I mean the other way —"

"What other way, Merle?"

"Well — a different way —"

He was gazing at her pleadingly, as though begging for understanding. She wanted to tell him that she did understand, and she wondered what she could say or what gesture she could make that would put him at ease, but at the same time she hesitated to let herself encourage him. She could feel a slight trembling of her body.

"Will you — Miss Courtright?" she heard him say.

"What other way do you mean, Merle?" she asked then.

"I want to see you — tonight —"

"Why do you want to do that?" she asked, turning and looking away from him. She was certain she realized what he meant, but just the same some impulse drove her to want to hear him say it. "Tell me why, Merle."

"Because it's — because I like you — Miss Courtright — and I want —"

"No, Merle," she spoke up

quickly, looking into his face and shaking her head firmly. She realized the time had come when she must discourage him. "You can't do that."

"Why not?" he asked dejectedly. "Don't you like me?"

"It's not that, Merle. Of course, I like you. You are a very fine boy. I admire you very much. But — but I'm a teacher, and it just wouldn't do for a teacher to see one of the students — not the way you're talking about. Now you understand, don't you?"

"Nobody would know about it — Miss Courtright," he persisted, squeezing her hands more tightly. "I could come here to see you after dark tonight — and nobody would ever know about it."

He moved closer as he spoke and she could feel the tenseness of his muscular body as he pressed against her. Judith closed her eyes momentarily, telling herself that she must not let him kiss her, because she was afraid if that happened she would no longer have control over herself.

"You're so beautiful — Miss Courtright," he was saying in a husky voice. "Everything about you is beautiful — you're the prettiest girl I've ever seen. I've watched you every day since you came here to teach — and you're prettier all the time." He squeezed her hands in his powerful grip. "Let me come to see you tonight! Please let me! Please, Miss Courtright!"

Taking a deep breath, Judith smiled at him tenderly as she slowly shook her head.

"No, Merle," she spoke to him in a low voice, trying to be as kind as she could. "You must remember that I'm twenty-two years old, and you're only eighteen. Even if I weren't a teacher, and you weren't one of the students, there would still be that difference. You understand now, don't you?"

"That doesn't make any difference," he protested. "That doesn't matter at all. I don't care about that."

"But I do, Merle," she told him steadfastly, trying to withdraw her hands from his. "It makes a great deal of difference to me."

"I don't see why," he said, sad with disappointment.

She smiled at him kindly. "Some day you'll understand, Merle."

With a sudden movement, he put his arms around her and pulled her tightly against him, and she realized that he would surely kiss her if she did not get away from him at once. Pushing against him with all her might, she managed to open the door of the car and get out before he could stop her.

Presently, subdued and silent, and not looking at her, Merle took her two suitcases from the car and carried them to the front door of the house. Putting down the suitcases, and with only a hasty glance at her, Merle turned and hurried back to the car. While her eyes slowly filled

with tears, she stood at the door until the sedan had passed out of sight up the street.

Judith took the bus to New Orleans as soon as school was dismissed on Friday afternoon.

Several days before that she had written to Eve Grayson and said that at last she was coming to spend the weekend, and Eve had promptly sent her a joyous telegram. She arrived in New Orleans at dusk and took a taxi to Eve's apartment.

It had been four months since they had last seen each other, and for two hours they talked and laughed about everything they could think of, the only exception being that in the beginning Judith was careful not to mention Merle Randolph. Several times while they were talking, Eve would try to make Judith promise to come to visit her every weekend during the remainder of the school year. Judith would say that she would try to come as often as she could from that week onward. Each time that happened, Eve would pour some more whisky into their glasses and they would drink a toast to the weekends to come.

After they had had several drinks, Judith finally told Eve about Merle Randolph and how he continued to try to persuade her to let him come to see her by writing pleading notes and putting them on her desk at school or under her apartment door.

"The boy is infatuated with you, Judith," Eve said knowingly. "Why don't you let him come to see you just once, anyway?"

"Oh, I couldn't do that," she protested. "It's too much of a risk. Somebody would find out about it, and then I'd have to resign and leave Lancaster. Besides, I don't know what might happen if we were alone together like that."

Eve laughed. "It's my guess that it would be the most spectacular kissing-date in the history of Lancaster."

"That's what I'd be afraid of," Judith said frankly.

Later in the evening, after they had eaten dinner, the phone rang several times. Each time Eve answered the call, she would say that she was engaged for the evening and then ask the caller to phone again the next night. During the evening, and until they finally went to bed at midnight, Judith attempted several times to get Eve to tell her what kind of job she had and about the kind of work she did, but Eve always laughed and said it was too unimportant to talk about at a time like that when they had not seen each other for so long a time and had so many interesting things to talk about.

Late the next afternoon, which was Saturday, and the day before Judith was going to return to Lancaster, the phone rang. After Eve had talked to someone for awhile, she told Judith that one of her friends

would be there in a few minutes. Then just before the doorbell rang, Eve asked her if she would mind waiting in the other bedroom for a little while.

Judith had just gone into her room and closed the door when she heard a man's voice in the parlor, and in a few minutes she heard the closing of Eve's bedroom door. During the next half-hour she could hear voices and sounds in the room next to hers, although she was unable to understand anything that was said, and then later there was a knock on her door. When she opened it, Eve came into the room and sat down on the bed.

"Where is your friend?" she asked Eve.

"Oh, he's gone."

"So soon?"

Eve answered with a nod of her head.

"Does he always leave so quickly?" Judith asked.

Eve smiled at her. "What you mean, Judith, is do they always leave so soon — not just he."

"I don't understand," Judith told her.

Eve got up from the bed. "Let's go make ourselves a drink, Judith," she said as she walked from the room.

They went into the kitchenette and filled two glasses with ice cubes and whisky. Nothing was said until they went into the parlor and sat down on the sofa.

"I hope you're coming back

next weekend," Eve said presently. "Please do, Judith."

"I don't think I can come that soon," Judith said. "But I will come back again — if you want me to."

"Then promise to come back two weeks from now," Eve begged. "I want to introduce you to some friends of mine. I'm sure you'll like them."

"All right," Judith agreed. "It's a promise."

The phone rang and Eve got up to answer it.

It was Saturday again, and another warm night in early spring. Judith had come to spend the weekend with Eve once more. Every week during the past two months she had left Lancaster on the bus as soon as school was dismissed on Friday afternoon, returning there from New Orleans late Sunday night.

The phone had rung several times already that evening, and, as they were in the habit of doing now, she and Eve took turns answering the calls. Shortly after eleven o'clock the phone rang once more, and it was Judith's turn to answer it. Somebody who would not give his name asked if he could come to the apartment right away.

Eve was in her room when the doorbell rang, and Judith opened the door. Startled, she stepped backward, putting her hand over her mouth. Even in the dimly lighted

room, Judith had recognized him at once. Merle Randolph's tall muscular figure and stubby light hair and shy expression were more conspicuously his than ever before. He still had not looked directly at her. He had gone to the middle of the parlor and was standing there glancing at the strange surroundings.

Judith slowly closed the door and stood with her back against it as thoughts raced in confusion through her mind. The next thing she was aware of, Merle had turned around and was staring open-mouthed at her.

"Miss Courtright —" he said almost indistinctly. "Miss Courtright — what are you doing here —"

Judith could find no way to answer him. She continued to stand there with her back pressed tightly against the door, gripping her hands and holding her breath for moment after moment. The room seemed to have suddenly been filled with sultry, stifling heat.

"But — Miss Courtright — you're not —" Merle said, shaking his head in disbelief.

"What are you doing here, Merle?" she asked weakly.

"We played a basketball game in New Orleans tonight — and we won it, too — the score was 72 to 64. It was the last game of the season for us and the coach said we could walk around town for a while or go to a movie and not have to get back to the hotel till midnight. While I was walking around, somebody told me

to call a certain phone number — if I wanted to — but I didn't know you —”

Judith managed to smile slightly. “I'm glad Lancaster won the game,” she said.

There was a brief interval of silence in the room after that.

“What are you going to do — Merle?” Judith asked finally.

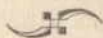
Merle shook his head. “I don't know — Miss Courtright — but I can't stay here! I've got to go!”

“But, Merle —”

As he came across the room in

long strides, Judith moved away from the door. When he reached it, he flung open the door, and, without looking at her again, ran toward the street. After he had gone, Judith closed the door and locked it securely.

By the time she reached the sofa and fell upon it, her eyes were filled with tears. Sometime later she was aware that Eve was shaking her and begging her to tell what had happened, but Judith closed her eyes more tightly and cried out with all the despair of her heart.



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LIEUTENANT GRISSON stretched a hairy hand across his desk and turned on the goose neck lamp. Outside, it was early dusk, but here in the police station it was dark. Blinding light flooded Grisson's young-old face, winked in his gray eyes. He turned the lamp away toward the desk top, settled comfortably in his chair. He took his cap off, laid it on the floor, and mopped his head and face with a wadded handker-

I Saw Her Die

Mr. Hewitt said he'd seen a murder, but there wasn't any corpse. Nobody, of course, believed him . . .

BY GIL BREWER

chief in his big hand. "God damn, it's hot," he said.

Two policemen in plain clothes stood silently smoking by a row of lockers across the room. They were both of medium build. The blond one was Halliwell, the round-faced, dark-haired one was Dibble.

The door on the far side of the room opened and a small man stepped in. He closed the door very carefully.

"Here's a cus-



tomers," Halliwell said. "Grisson just gets on duty and it starts."

"We're on duty, too," Dibble said.

They shut up.

The small man stood by the door a moment, as if doubtful this was the right place. He wore overalls, the greasy straps cutting across bare, sunburned shoulders. The overalls were too large for him and they were heavy with dirt.

Grisson looked at the man, started to reach for his cap, mopped his face instead.

"Who do I talk to?" the man said. His voice was full of the Florida backwoods, fields of palmetto, snuff, and dark mossy riverbanks.

Grisson cleared his throat, glanced at Halliwell and Dibble, then back at the man.

"It depends," he said.

"I got something here. I got to tell somebody, I reckon. I got to tell a cop."

"You're in the right place."

The man moved toward the desk and Grisson waited. The overalls were so stiff with dirt it was as though the man moved inside a very large barrel. Grisson wondered if the man were drunk.

"They's been a murder," the man said. He lifted two huge, trembling, dirt-rutted hands and knotted them slowly into fists.

"Uh-huh," Grisson said.

"I seen it."

"Oh," Grisson said. "All right. Tell me about it."

"That's why I come here," the man said, lowering his fists and speaking slowly. "I reckon."

Halliwell coughed.

Grisson cleared his throat again. "Go ahead."

"Sho, now," the man said. "Just tell it?"

"Uh-huh." Grisson grabbed the book and slammed it open on the desk. He snatched a pen from the ink-well and scratched in the time and date. "What's your name?"

"Hewitt," the man said. "Marvin P. J. Hewitt. Them middle ones stand for Purdy and Juke. I don't never now use 'em, one or other."

"Where you live, Mister Hewitt?"

"Over by Lake Seminole. We got a house, there. My wife and me, and the kids. I got five kids. We used to live in Tampa. Not any more, though."

"Relax," Grisson said. "You don't have to be nervous."

"It's what I seen, does it," Hewitt said. "Can't help twitching."

"All right. What's your work, Mister Hewitt?"

"I'm a landscaper." Hewitt didn't know what to do with his hands. "Working yonder at Oak Summit, landscaping for Mulbrock's Nursery. New development, over there. Setting out trees."

Grisson closed the book, slid it across the desk, leaned back and sneezed.

"Should I tell it, now?" Hewitt said.

"Sure."

"I was born near Ocala," Hewitt said.

Grisson waited. Dibble lit another cigarette and sat on the small bench beside the lockers. Halliwell joined him.

Hewitt began to shake under the overalls. The shaking came and went in spasms.

"Just relax," Grisson said. "You say you saw something. Go ahead and —"

"Murder!" Hewitt said.

"All right," Grisson said. "Let's take it one at a time. Where did you see this?"

Hewitt stared at Grisson. He opened and closed his mouth several times, very slowly.

"Look," Grisson said. "You'll have to calm down. Would you like a drink of water?"

"No, sir," Hewitt said. "I'm all right now. It's just what I seen, does it."

"You're all right now, then?"

"Reckon so. It was this afternoon. I was setting a palm out in this here back yard. There wasn't nobody else around, and I heard a yell from three houses down. In the Florida room, sounded like."

"I see."

"Wasn't nobody else around. Didn't pay much attention. Then I heard one more yell."

"What kind of a yell?" Halliwell asked.

Grisson lifted a hand, said, "Wait. Go on, Mister Hewitt."

"It was a woman, yelled," Hewitt

said. "I cut down around the houses and came up by the Florida room and looked in. He was killing her."

"What?"

"The man, there. He had this here gal down on the floor, hitting her. He hit the hell out of her. I could tell she was dead, but he kept on."

"Kept on?"

"Hitting and hitting. She had on a red bathing suit."

"How could you tell she was dead?" Halliwell asked.

Grisson held up his hand. "Go on, Mister Hewitt."

"Well," Hewitt said. "I was watching, like I say. I was scared. I didn't know what to do."

"For hell's sake," Halliwell said.

Grisson turned slowly and looked at Halliwell.

Halliwell lit another cigarette, avoiding Grisson's eyes.

"Then he had a knife in his hand," Hewitt said. "He stood up and he bent down and drug the knife across her throat. Easy, like pie. She bled some," Hewitt said. "He wiped the knife on her leg, good and clean. Then he folded it and stuck it in his pocket, and went into the bathroom."

"How do you know this?"

"I snuck along the house," Hewitt said. "He went in there and got a bunch of rags and come back and sopped it up. Then he looked up and he seen me."

Dibble grunted.

"Let me get this straight," Grisson said. "No," he said. "Never

mind. You say he saw you?"

"Looked right at me, sir. Yes, sir. We stared at each other through the window."

"Then what?"

"I lit out," Hewitt said.

"How long ago was this?"

"I come right from there."

"Did he chase you?"

"He never come out of that house. I ran through the block, got in the truck and come over here. It's a good ways."

"Oak Summit," Grisson said.

"Yes, sir."

"Wasn't there *anybody* else around?"

"Not a soul on that block but me," Hewitt said slowly. "Three blocks over they're building, but that's a long ways. Not a soul. My truck was parked across the block, like I say."

"Did you see any cars?"

"They was a car front of the house. A blue Chevvy."

"You saw that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ever see it before?"

"There's lots of blue Chevvis. I lit out."

"Did you know these people? Have you ever seen them before?"

"Seems like the man might be a salesman. Real estate. They got a office at Oak Summit, so they can show the houses."

"But you aren't sure?"

"Couldn't swear to a thing. Just what I seen."

Grisson stared at Hewitt.

"It's a hell of a one," Hewitt said. "He saw me. I can't get that outa my head. He knows I saw him."

Grisson turned and looked at Halliwell and Dibble. They stood up and came over by the desk and stared at Hewitt.

"Take him out there and see what this is all about," Grisson said. "Phone in."

"Let's go," Halliwell said to Hewitt.

Halliwell was a cynical man. He didn't believe a word of what Hewitt said, because somehow it didn't ring true. He knew Dibble didn't believe it, either. He did not know what Grisson thought.

They drove out to Oak Summit.

"She must have been alive," Dibble said. "Or she wouldn't have bled when he cut her throat."

"Said she bled *some*," Hewitt told Dibble.

"You said he 'sopped' it up," Halliwell said.

"Sopped, mopped — what would you say?" Hewitt said.

"All right." Halliwell could tell Hewitt was very nervous. The man kept looking out of the car window into the darkness.

"Tell me where to turn," Halliwell said.

"Turn here. Just go right on down and your first right, and stop at the sixth house. That's it."

Halliwell did that. The crickets were loud. It was absolutely quiet out there, except for the crickets. It was very hot. There was no wind.

"Jesus Christ," Hewitt said. "He saw me."

"Let's go," Halliwell said. "Frank, you bring the flash."

They crunched up the driveway and across the walk to the front door of the house.

"Mostly they leave the doors open," Hewitt said. "During the daytime, that is. Sometimes they forget to lock 'em at night."

"You know everything, don't you?" Halliwell said.

"Easy, boy," Dibble said.

"How come they leave the doors unlocked?" Halliwell asked.

"So folks can look."

The door was open. They went inside. The place smelled of fresh paint and plaster and raw wood and wet cement. It was much hotter inside the house and the crickets were muted and far away after Dibble closed the door.

"Hardly breathe," Halliwell said. "All right, Hewitt. Show us the body." He turned the flashlight beam into Hewitt's eyes.

"Right through there, in the Florida room," Hewitt said.

They went into the empty Florida room. The rear door was open, leading into the back yard. Sand had blown through the door, and was drifted on the floor.

"It's gone," Hewitt said. He stood in the center of the room and looked around at the windows. "He saw me," he said.

Halliwell turned the flashlight on him again and watched him shake.

"Show us where it was, Mister Hewitt," Dibble said.

"It ain't here," Hewitt said.

"It never was here," Halliwell said. "Right, Hewitt?"

Hewitt didn't answer. He apparently was thinking about something, though. He kept looking at the windows of the Florida room. He seemed to shrink inside the overalls.

Halliwell turned to Dibble. "Go on outside," he said. "Open the front door wide. Park the car so you can train the spotlight in here across the floor. All right?"

Dibble went outside. Pretty soon a spreading beam of white light lit the Florida room like daytime. The only tracks and scuffings on the sand-blown floor had been made by them.

Dibble came back.

"Not a sign of anything," Halliwell said. "Asphalt tile floor. Perfectly dry."

Hewitt stepped up to Halliwell and touched his arm.

"He could of thrown sand in the door," Hewitt said. "The door wasn't open before."

"Hell," Halliwell said.

Dibble got down on his hands and knees. "You say about here, Mister Hewitt?"

Hewitt nodded. His mouth was open again, slowly moving, and he was watching the windows.

"I can't see a thing," Dibble said. "Not a sign. If she bled, it would have gotten into the cracks between

the tile. You'd think so, anyway."

"There'd be something," Halliwell said. "Well," he said. "That's that."

"You don't believe me," Hewitt said.

"We'd better check on the car," Dibble said. "The blue Chevvy. He said something about the real estate office."

Halliwell shrugged. "All right. Go report in, I'll check the bathroom."

Dibble left and Halliwell went into the bathroom with the flashlight. He could hear Dibble at the radio in the car. There was nothing in the bathroom aside from the usual furnishings, and a bucket of dried cement.

Halliwell returned to the Florida room. Hewitt wasn't there, so he went on outside and closed the door. Hewitt was talking with Dibble.

"You've got to believe me," Hewitt said as Halliwell came up to the police car. "You've got to! I seen him, you hear? And he seen me. Jesus Christ." Hewitt turned and looked at Halliwell and snapped his fingers three times.

"We'd better check out that car," Dibble said.

"All right." They ran down the head of the realty company and questioned him. They found him repairing a fishing rod in his garage. He told them that there had been a man working for them who was out there at Oak Summit and this man drove a Chevvy, only it was light green.

"It might have been that color — green," Hewitt said.

"Only he's in California," the realty man told them. "He left for San Francisco three weeks ago."

"What have I got to do to prove it to you?" Hewitt said as they walked back to the police car. "I tell you, I seen it! There must be some way to prove it to you."

"Sure," Halliwell said. He was mad. He could have been sitting on the bench back there at headquarters, smoking. Damn these hallucinating characters, anyway.

They drove back into town. Dibble didn't have much to say.

"You got to believe me," Hewitt said. "He could of dried the floor up, dusted it with sand, that way. Can't you see that?"

"Look," Halliwell said. "Let us worry about it. You reported it. It's off your hands. You made a mistake, that's all. We're not mad at you." He looked out the side window of the car, then continued driving carefully. "Where's your car, Hewitt?"

"I left the truck by the police station."

"All right. You get in it and drive on home. That it, up there?"

"That's it," Hewitt said. "Jesus Christ."

They parked. They walked Hewitt over to his truck. It was a truck from Mulbrock's Nursery. Hewitt climbed behind the wheel of the truck and looked down at them.

"I wish you boys would believe

me," Hewitt said. He gripped the steering wheel of the truck very hard. Then he looked at them and yelled in their faces. "I seen it! You hear! I seen it!"

"All right," Halliwell said. "Go on home. Forget about it. We'll be working on it."

Halliwell and Dibble walked away. Hewitt sat there behind the wheel of the truck and watched them. He watched them pause on the steps of the police station and light cigarettes and blow smoke into the night. The awful bright sanctuary of the station made Hewitt almost sick to his stomach. He was sweating under his overalls.

He seen me, Hewitt thought. *He seen me watching him.*

He started the truck and drove off out of town. He felt dizzy and sick and he couldn't stop shaking. He was scared so badly he kept his toes pressed tight up against the tops of his shoes. He had to go home and

he didn't want to go home. He wanted to go back there and just sit on those brightly lighted steps of the police station.

As he turned onto the road that led toward Lake Seminole, it seemed every car he saw turned and followed him.

One did.

Halliwell and Dibble were sent out on it. It was five days later and a family at the end of Ninth Street, near the sand pits, had complained of a bad smell.

Halliwell and Dibble stood there on a mound of sand and looked at the two bodies laid out side by side. They were in a bad state of decomposition, but the red bathing suit and the dirty overalls were in good condition.

"Somebody's going to catch hell for this," Halliwell said through his handkerchief.

"Yeah," Dibble said. "But Hewitt sure proved his point, didn't he?"



CRIME CAVALCADE

BY VINCENT H. GADDIS

Baby-Sitting Bandits

In Chicago, two gunmen told bedtime stories to keep the children quiet, while waiting for the father's return, in order to rob him of \$4,525 in cash and jewelry. Posing as a telegraph boy, one of the gang of five gained admittance to the home of Louis Fahrberger, a bakery owner, and forced the baby-sitter, Mrs. Marian Schmidt, 36, to take him through the house hunting for valuables. Then two more men entered, leaving one at the wheel of each of two cars outside. The men made so much noise breaking into a wall safe that the three children were awakened. For 45 minutes, two of the men took turns telling the kids about Goldilocks and the big bad wolf. When Mr. Fahrberger finally walked in, one of the men seized Mrs. Schmidt and forced the baker to open his safe by threatening to shoot her. The robbers then left with the loot after locking Fahrberger, the baby sitter and the three children in a closet.

Counter-Irritant

In Orlando, Fla., police found an irate citizen beating on a garbage pail and barking with all his might. He informed them that he was try-

ing to outdo the neighbor's dog, who had repeatedly kept him awake by nocturnal howls.

Literal Lawmen

In Buffalo, N. Y., a police car sent to investigate a man riding "up and down" suspiciously in front of a dwelling, promptly reported back, "Not suspicious. Man driving back and forth, not up and down."

Trouser Troubles

Baton Rouge, La., police arrested Robert Bell when they noticed he had an extra pants leg as he walked down the street. It was dangling from an umbrella he had also taken from a local store.

Wah Lee, Chinese laundryman in Sacramento, Calif., stopped a robbery and gained a pair of work pants when he suddenly awakened one night and surprised a burglar. As the alarmed thief tried to leave by a window, Lee grabbed his pants and hung on. The intruder wriggled out of the trousers and escaped in his shorts.

While in Kalamazoo, Mich., William Abbott, burglar alarm agent for American District Telegraph Co., lost his trousers when answering an alarm. As he entered the store, a young man with his hand held inside his shirt faced him. "Hold it," he

said to Abbott. "Your life's worth more than mine." He then helped himself to Abbott's gun, wallet and pants before he fled.

Siren Call

Norfolk, Va., police arrested a drunk for stealing a white Fire department car, driving all over town with the siren blaring, charging gasoline to the city at a filling station, and then wrecking the car as they stopped him.

In Hamilton, Ont., ex-fireman Alfred Gubbin, 35, was arrested for stealing the chief's car when an alarm came in while he was visiting the station. Police got Gubbins a little later with his siren wailing, but going in the opposite direction from the fire.

A Townsend, Mass., youth, Thomas Walker, was arrested after a 4 hour search, following his Sunday jaunt in the town's only fire engine with clanging bells and screaming siren. The 14-ton red truck was found abandoned deep in a woods near Ashby. Then they discovered Walker hiding in a nearby house.

Telltale Trail

Columbia, S. C., police arrested Keith Lannigan, of Portland, Me., following a filling station break-in which ended with the intruder fleeing through a window. He landed outside with one foot in a bucket of black paint and the other in white. No bloodhounds were required to pick up the trail.

Healthy Hideout

Philadelphia police uncovered a lucrative racket in their own city-operated health center, when caretakers James and Gladys Weathers were found to be running a speak-easy and gambling joint on the premises each night. They had card and dice games going in the doctors' offices, and served drinks to customers at a neat profit.

Vacationing Victims

When Mr. and Mrs. Joe Garcia returned to their Douglas, Ariz., home after a 6-month vacation, they found some surprising changes. The police report listed as missing a bed, cupboards, medicine cabinet, windows, plumbing pipes, toilet and light bulbs. Outside, the steel posts and clothesline had also been removed. In spite of all these activities, neighbors had noticed nothing suspicious.

Mrs. Clifford Bundy, of Enid, Okla., was more suspicious when she left on vacation. She took her silverware with her. But, before she could unpack her car when she returned, a thief stole the silver, valued at \$200.

Odorous Revenge

William J. Abel, 24, who had complained vehemently of a "smelly deal" following his conviction of drunken driving, set loose a live skunk in the police station at Roseville, Mich., shortly thereafter. "I hear that, if you get bitten by an animal, you have to bring it in," he

informed the astonished officers with a grin.

Hoodlums' Honor

Recently on exhibit in a showing of Bibles at Chicago University was a copy known as the "Gangsters' Bible." Members of the former Capone gang were said to have sworn solemn oaths of loyalty with their hands on its worn cover.

Female Frustrations

Police in Muskegon, Mich., had to tell a woman they couldn't help her when her husband locked up the telephone to make her do her housework. On her complaint they visited the home to find the phone shut into "the stoutest, strongest little wooden box" they had ever seen, fastened with a sledge-proof padlock. Her husband, she told them, believed she spent too much time gossiping on the phone. This was her second plea for their help. The first time her spouse had formed the morning habit of locking up her shoes so she couldn't go visiting.

Fast Worker

While Willis Wells, of Chicago, was fastening the rear license plate on his car, an unknown opportunist got away with the 1955 plate off the front.

Birds of a Feather

While interviewing a Wichita, Kans., woman whose home had been ransacked, Patrolman Luther Flowers asked her if she had any friends who might be suspects. "Yes," she exclaimed, "all of them!"

Damp Hideaway

New York City Narcotics squad detectives Frank Martorella and Gerald Callahan had no sooner identified themselves in the Manhattan apartment of Mrs. Julio Avilis, than she asked permission to take the baby to the bathroom for a change of diapers. Her insistence prompted them to take over the job themselves. Tucked in the diaper's folds they found a glassine envelope holding 1½ ounces of heroin. They booked the baby's 31-year-old father and his friend, Tony Santana, 26.

Too, Too Rugged

William J. Swift, of Oakland, Calif., admitted in court to ignoring 12 traffic tickets and paid \$480. Leaving the courtroom, he was handed 16 more warrants from nearby San Francisco, and paid an additional \$190. But as he attempted to leave the second time, Officer William Mestrovich gave him a \$5 ticket from Alameda, then grabbed it back. "Be my guest," he said with a rush of sympathy.

Blonde at the Wheel

shared the job there with palm trees, partially screening the beach and blue water beyond. I wondered how long we'd been driving like that. I wondered if I should know the girl's name. She wore a one-piece, strapless yellow bathing suit, tight across her tawny thighs, low and tight across her chest, where the cleft between her breasts was darker than the

"Sometimes it happens like that," he said. "I wake up and I don't remember what's happened. But I never found blood on my clothes before."

A Novelene

BY STEPHEN MARLOWE

IT WAS a tomato-red convertible with cream colored leather fixings. I looked under the girl's tawny arm and saw the speedometer needle dance up around seventy, then glue itself there. The dash looked Buick.

"I don't know why I'm doing this," the girl said.

Sun-scorched asphalt shimmered on the highway with heat-haze. Scrub pine crowded the road on our right, fringed it sparsely on the left and



rest of her. Long yellow hair wind-whipped behind her, fluttering over the curve of neck and bare shoulders. Very white and very green against her tawny face, her eyes looked straight ahead at the road.

"You don't know why you're doing what?" I said.

The Buick slowed. The girl's thighs shifted around on the leather seat as she got her right foot off the gas pedal and on the brake.

"If that's your attitude," she told me, "we can stop right now. End of the line."

"I'm sorry. I don't remember."

"What do you take me for?" She'd set her lips in a straight line, a crimson slash on the bronzed face.

"No. Sometimes I forget. I try to remember so hard, but the more I try, the worse it gets. I don't know how long we've been driving. I don't remember starting. I don't know who you are. I have a headache."

We crawled along at thirty. A black and white roadsign rolled up on our left. Florida A1A, the Ocean Highway. "It's the truth," I said a little desperately. "I can't remember a thing."

"You begged me to give you a ride last night. We've been driving ever since. Are you trying to tell me you have amnesia?"

"No. They have fancy words for it. War neurosis. Battle fatigue. A lot of stuff like that. I was in South Carolina yesterday. Sumter. On business. I must have flown down here. I don't remember."

"You were in St. Augustine yesterday. I met you reading the Sunday paper on the beach."

"Sunday papers?" I asked foolishly. "My God, what happened to last week? Tuesday I was in Sumter. Tuesday. . . ."

"Have a cigarette, Fred." Her purse lay between us on the seat. She groped in it with her right hand, found a pack of Camels and tossed it to me. "Are you telling me the truth?"

I lit up with the dash lighter. "Damn it, yes."

"You were running away from something last night. I met you on the beach in the afternoon. We swam together, you took me to dinner. You took me to my motel. You came by later in the evening. You looked a mess. You'd been drinking. You still look like hell."

I glanced down at my clothing. T-shirt and khaki trousers. The T-shirt was torn and cake-stained with brown.

"That's blood, I think. . . ." the girl told me.

"Blood? I don't remember anything." And I didn't. The medics had said war neuroses come in a wide variety. With me it was temporary amnesia, turning itself on and off at irregular intervals and leaving me with a headache and without memory. The cure was time, they said. Forget about Korea. See things. Do things. Live a normal life.

I crossed my arms down at the belt line and slipped the torn T-

shirt off over my head. It looked like blood, all right. I balled the T-shirt up and tossed it away into the scrub pine, watching it open up, snag on a branch and flutter there, a tattered white flag. I felt better when the ocean highway curved and hid it from view.

"You were in a fight, you said. Had to get away in a hurry. It was dark. I should have asked questions. I didn't see the blood until this morning."

"Why didn't you say so? If I'm in some kind of trouble you shouldn't stick your nose into it."

"You don't remember anything, do you?" She smiled at me, taking her eyes off the road for the first time. The smile warmed her face and warmed me and I thought it was wonderful to have a friend when you're sick and need the kind of help doctors can't give. "Last night, after you took me home from dinner . . . well, if you don't remember. Try, Fred. . . ."

"I'm trying." Everything since Sumter, South Carolina, was a blank. "It's no good."

Her eyes blinked and got all watery. She stepped down hard on the gas pedal. The Dynaflow roared under us with a new surge of power and she didn't look at me again. She said, without expression, "Then you don't remember anything?"

"Nothing," I admitted. "Better take me back. If I did anything wrong, I'm not going to run away from it."

"We're almost in Miami Beach. We could take the causeway over to Miami and have you on a plane for Havana in a couple of hours. You don't have to go back, Fred."

"I've got to. If I keep running away from things I'll never get well. Like throwing that shirt away. It was bloody, all right. It got me scared. Whenever I start remembering again, things get me scared like that. It could have been a bloody nose or something. What's a little blood? Happens all the time. I was drinking, I was in a fight. Big deal."

"Who are you trying to convince, me or you?"

"Big deal," I went right on. "No more running. If you can't take me back, I'll try to hitch a ride."

"I haven't anyplace to go. I thought you wanted to run away. I can take you back if that's what you really want."

"That's what I really want."

"You were talking in your sleep this morning."

"Was I?"

"Yes. I'm afraid it wasn't a bloody nose, Fred. You kept on talking and saying you were sorry and you had to get away and would I hurry. You were trembling and sweating and cursing. You said it was murder."

I ground the cigarette out in the dashboard ash-tray, then pulled the small metal box out and emptied its contents, watching the butts scurry against the side of the car before they tumbled away. I looked up at the sun and it brooded sullenly over a

hot, smoky sky. I figured by the position of the sun it was almost noon and would get hotter and whoever brought the chamber of commerce story up north that Florida isn't a sweatbox in the summer was a damned liar. I'd said it was murder. I'd done some peculiar things when I got that way, forgetting. Told about them later and looked at people queerly, and my stomach used to tie itself in knots and I'd have to drink too much, to forget in a different way. I couldn't stay in one place long. I had to travel so people wouldn't know. But murder . . . back in Kingston, New York, the neighbors used to whisper and my folks would smile like it wasn't anything and the doc had said no, he doesn't have to be committed anywhere, but the way they looked at me made me want to run and keep on running. They didn't understand. How could they? I didn't want them to, because pity would be even worse and that was why I couldn't stay long in one place. It was part of the sickness. Before I was going to forget I would start to talk about it and the doc said that was fine, people could care for me then if they knew it was coming. But I thought it was like being a werewolf when the moon was full and if you just locked him up that night, that one night when the moon was full each month and only if there were no clouds in the sky, everything would be all right. So I'd run and I'd held more jobs in a year than an employ-

ment agency gets to see, over more territory than a travel agency cares about.

And now I'd killed a man.

"You take me back, then," I said, lighting another Camel and throwing it away after the first puff because it tasted like punk and I was past the punk-smoking age.

2.

We got back to St. Augustine an hour before nightfall. Matanzas Bay glittered in the sunlight with the pleasure boats bobbing on it like painted corks. The bigger commercial fishing boats had pulled into the Municipal Pier and I watched tourists testing their legs on land again as the traffic snarled us near Lion Bridge. St. Augustine seemed more Spanish than Spain itself, except for the language. Overhanging balconies threatened to fall and block the narrow streets, but they'd stood that way, threatening, for generations. Wrought iron grillwork made you think of New Orleans.

The tourists chattered gayly, calling to one another and making plans for the evening. I wondered what it was like to be carefree and planning on fun for the evening, or the next day, or the rest of your life. I tried to think of me like that, but it was a long time ago and not easy to recall and Korea was in the way and everything afterwards, which in a lot of ways made even Korea seem not so bad.

"Do you remember where . . . where it happened, Fred?"

"No."

"We could go to the police, if you'd made up your mind. We can still forget about it, though. Say the word and I'll turn right around and . . ."

"First thing you're going to do is get something to eat. But no, I won't be going to the police. Not yet. I want to reconstruct this thing if I can. There are newspapers to read, places to go. I'll work it out. I don't want you around, though. You've been swell. Now you've got your own life to lead. I owe you a dinner, but that's all." I gave it to her like that, short and choppy, because she'd been kinder to me than a person has a right to be under the circumstances and I didn't want her blowing my nose for me all the time.

Our Buick followed a Cad around the lighthouse and across Lion Bridge into the heart of the city. We found a small restaurant with its own parking lot and went inside. I picked up a newspaper at the counter before a waiter convoyed us to a wall booth and flipped a couple of menus on the table. *El Piscador*, the menu said. The fisher. I hadn't noticed outside. I'd been thinking of the newspaper and what I might or might not find in it. Now, when the waiter brought water I said, "Beer. Plenty of cold beer."

He came back with a frosted pitcher and two glasses and I said we'd order later.

El Piscador was a third-rate eatery, with no air-conditioning, stale, uncirculated air, waiters who'd learned how to walk around in hundred-degree temperature and tattered monkey-suits without sweating, and a management that didn't mind its patrons wearing faded khaki trousers, tennis shoes and nothing else.

"I have no change," the girl said. "Give me a dime?"

I nodded, found one and shoved it across the table.

"Got to clean up. They might have one of those pay things, Fred. Be back in a minute."

I thought the odds against *El Piscador* making a tariff, on anything but food, were tremendous. I thought that and a lot of other unimportant things and I had been so eager to get my hands on a St. Augustine newspaper but now that I had it I was afraid to start reading. On the way back to St. Augustine the girl told me her name was Petey. I watched Petey walking to the rear of *El Piscador* in her tight yellow bathing suit, damp and dark with sweat because she'd been sitting and driving so long.

It was a beautiful thing to watch, but there was this newspaper in my hand. My hands were clammy and had soaked up some newsprint. They shook when I spread the eight-sheet paper out on the table, and I still didn't look. I poured some beer and let it caress my throat, then poured some more and thought, what the

hell, if I killed someone I killed him and it will be here to read and not reading it won't make it any less true.

St. Augustine is a city of less than fifteen thousand, and a killing will get the headlines every time. It got a four-inch banner this time and now my hands were really shaking. I tried for some more beer but couldn't pour it. I wished Petey would come back from the jame in a hurry and suggest again I run away. I closed my eyes and tried to think myself back in Korea or anyplace. It was all no good, so I took a deep breath and wondered if they hung people in Florida or electrocuted them or what. Then I read.

MAN MURDERED IN BUENA VISTA MOTEL

Knife Wound Proves Fatal To Vacationing Tampa Resident

There was an amateurish photograph showing the sheet-draped body and three pairs of legs standing guard over it. An insert showed a switch-bladed knife framed by a neat white handkerchief on someone's hand and the cut-line proclaimed unnecessarily that it was the murder weapon. The article said the man, name of Walter Pearson, a wealthy cigar manufacturer who owned half of what made Ybor City a city, had been found at eight this morning when a cleaning girl entered an unoccupied room to prepare it for the possibility of an occupant. It was already occupied.

Walter Pearson, dead, a four inch switch-blade sandwiched between two of his ribs up to the hilt. There were no known suspects, no motive, no clues. Mrs. Pearson had been notified and had flown to St. Augustine during the early afternoon to identify the body. The newspaper promised an interview with the bereaved in tomorrow's edition. The chief of police promised he'd get his man. This was a blot on the escutcheon of the fair city of St. Augustine or some such thing and the murderer, in all probability an out-of-towner, the chief of police said and hoped, would be apprehended forthwith.

I took out a handkerchief and mopped the back of my neck. I'd sat still long enough for the sweat which driving had fanned away to collect on my skin and drip off onto the table. A ceiling fan rotated sluggishly, stirring the flypaper hanging not far from its lazy blades but cooling the air not at all. They had no suspects, no clues. They knew no motive, although robbery had been guessed at since Pearson was wealthy. . . . I'd done some strange things during my sick periods, but robbery and murder. . . . The beer rumbled in my stomach and one of those piercing, throbbing headaches was threatening to sit down inside my skull and start twisting again. Petey's suggestion made sense. Even if I had killed Pearson, I didn't think of it as me. Not me, I wasn't the murderer. The

sick thing which takes over inside my brain from time to time, that was the guilty one. But could they lift him out of my skull and hang him and say to me you're free, free and cured, so go home, friend?

I stood up. I gazed around at people sipping beer and eating and making small talk. I heard some of it; I heard murder and kill and knife and motel in a kind of avid, eager flow of words. There was something thrilling, warped and table-talk stimulating, about having a murder in your home town. Almost like having a celebrity in your midst, putting your town on the map and making you feel suddenly important. And there was something just a shade dangerous about it, like kids getting up their courage and walking through a dark alley in some slum, half-expecting a hulking figure to dart out from the shadows and attack them. Here, in our town, St. Augustine, a killer is walking the streets, unapprehended. They'll get him. Oh, don't you worry, Charlie, they'll get him. Always do. Don't you go to the movies? But until they do, I think maybe the Missus will stay home at night and the kids and if there are any errands, I'll run them. *I'll* run them.

I thought of that guy in New Jersey who had brooded so long and so hard and had a different kind of war neurosis. It got all bottled up inside him and no one knew except maybe he was a little queer and kind of quiet, but he let it out

all at once, both barrels, and kept on blasting with it until he was spent. And when he was through he left a trail of dead in his wake and he wasn't sorry, just puzzled and confused.

I got up and I started walking toward the door, not even remembering about the beer I hadn't paid for. I didn't know if I was going to the police and tell them I thought I was their man but couldn't be sure because I didn't remember or, instead, run away. I didn't know and I wouldn't until I got outside, but I couldn't stay there in *El Piscador* with the newspaper spread on the table and the four-inch banner headline and everyone talking.

3.

"Fred. Fred! Wait a minute, please."

I turned. It was Petey. She looked down at the newspaper and then stared at me and at this distance I wasn't sure, but I thought she bit her lip. She picked up the check on the table and brought it to me. "Okay, Fred. We'll go someplace else. Pay the check and take it easy. Everything's going to be all right."

"Yeah," I said. "All right."

"Fred. Please. People are looking at you. You're dripping sweat and you've got the strangest expression. . . ."

"Sure." I paid the bill with a fiver, took my change and pocketed it. Petey steered me outside into the

gathering dusk, fanned but not relieved by hot, sticky gusts of wind. She gripped my arm with long, tawny fingers. I felt sick and she must have known it.

The yellow one-piece bathing suit and my sun-tans attracted scowls at night. We were on display as we headed back toward Petey's Buick, and I said so.

"We could go to my place, Fred."

"You live in St. Augustine?" It was a rhetorical question. Right then I didn't care if she lived in Timbuctoo. I either had to give myself up or run. I could think of disadvantages either way, but not advantages.

"No. I'm staying in a motel. I'm not the world's best cook, but there's a little kitchen in my place. What say?"

It would give me time to think. It would take me away from the jostling crowds. If Petey had some whiskey as well as food, it might clear my head so I could think. "You talked me into it," I said, and tried to smile.

Petey grabbed my arm possessively and steered me to the Buick. I climbed in and stared straight ahead while the convertible rolled smoothly from the parking lot. Growing darkness had taken the daytime mantle off a few of the brighter stars and the clean night breeze sweeping in off the Atlantic rustled palm fronds as Petey pointed the Buick's grill northward on U. S. 1. Palms surrendered to great old

trees which formed a canopy of foliage and Spanish moss overhead. By the time night squatted on the Florida coast, scrub pine replaced both the trees and the stately residential streets of St. Augustine.

Far ahead on our right, neon lighting blinked on and off, punctuating the night with a lurid red glow. We got closer and Petey slowed down. If the convertible's top were up, I'd have hit the roof. The neon glowed and faded, glowed and faded. The neon said:

*Buena Vista Motel — 25 Cabins
25 — 10 with kitchens*

"Jesus," I said. "Jesus."

"What is it?"

"You read the paper."

"Only the headline. Oh." Petey looked at me. "Oh. This is where you. . . ."

"Yeah."

"I'm sorry, Fred. I didn't realize." She braked the Buick and pulled off on the right shoulder of the highway, craning her neck to watch the traffic flash up behind us. A Greyhound bus roared past us, faint illumination inside shining coldly through blue-tinted windows. A new Studebaker followed impatiently in its wake, lacking sufficient pick-up to pass the bus with a curve bending the highway out of sight just beyond the Buena Vista Motel.

"We'll go back," Petey told me, and started to swing the Buick into a U turn.

I shook my head. "Uh-uh. If this is your place, this is where we eat."

Petey eased the Buick off the highway and onto a gravel drive leading to the Buena Vista Motel, a long, rambling structure set two hundred yards back from the road, its brick units looking like parts of one continuous building because carports connected them. Most of the carports were not empty.

"I admire you," Petey said.

"What for?"

"Well, if this is where you . . . killed the man, and you're willing to come back as if nothing happened. . . ."

"I'm not sure I killed anyone. It still could have been just a bloody nose and a coincidence. Running won't get me anywhere, unless I want to keep running the rest of my life."

"That's what I mean. I admire you. What did the newspaper say the police thought?"

"Nothing much. They've drawn a blank so far."

"I only had a chance to read the headlines, then I had to catch up with you. I was wondering."

"So are the police."

4.

We swung in front of the Buena Vista office and the dining room, pale fluorescent light washing the gravel driveway through its windows. Petey pulled the Buick into a carport at the far end of the motel, but before it was sandwiched in the darkness between two of the

sleeping units I noticed a white police car two ports down. A pulse began to hammer in my head. The police still had business at the Buena Vista.

"Here we are," said Petey. She reached into the top of her bathing suit and extracted a key with a little plastic tag attached to it. I wondered if the place would look familiar. Sometimes I had vague memories of what had happened during those periods of forgetting, and the murdered man's cabin must have been a carbon copy of Petey's.

She fingered a light-switch inside the door, bathing the room with the soft glow of fluorescents, recessed at the juncture of wall and ceiling. The Buena Vista was no fly-by-night motel, although most of its customers probably never stayed long enough to appreciate it. Petey's large room contained a double bed, a blonde chest and dressing table, a squat, modern easy chair, a writing table and a pair of pullup chairs. A small foyer led from it to the bathroom. The kitchen adjoined the bathroom, hardly more than a vestibule with stove and refrigerator in miniature, but it served the purpose.

Petey went straight to the refrigerator and got out an amber bottle of Schlitz. "You'd better start on this while I change."

"I was hoping you'd have something the same color but stronger."

"I've some bourbon." She conveyed me back to the bedroom, bent from the hips to the bottom

drawer of the chest, opened it and reached in. The yellow bathing suit rode up slightly on her thighs and stretched tautly on the flare of her hips. She looked dressed only because it was a different color.

Soon I was gulping bourbon gratefully from a tumbler and listening to the bustle Petey made in the miniature kitchen. I was hungry and the bourbon burned all the way down to my stomach and raced with warmth clean down to my fingertips and toes. It filled my head with buoyancy and I thought I'd murdered a man, probably. Somehow, it hardly seemed so bad with the bourbon and I got to thinking I wouldn't have to run away at all, not if the police had no leads. I drank more bourbon and thought the same thoughts stronger. I found a pack of cigarettes on the chest and a book of matches. Inhaling long and hard, I felt still better. I commenced blowing smoke rings and popping a finger through them. Then I poured more bourbon and did more gulping. I used the cigarette up and lit another one from the butt and kept on drinking. Petey and her labors in the kitchen sounded far, far away and I hoped she wouldn't hurry because I'd found a chance to relax for the first time in the long, impossible day and then I began to hope she would hurry because I remembered what she looked like bending over in the tight yellow bathing suit and there were all sorts of ways to relax,

some of them better than bourbon.

Petey came in with a couple of plates of spaghetti, steaming hot. She placed them on the writing table, glanced at me, smiled, took the tumbler from my hand and finished the remainder of the bourbon.

"I have to change," she said, her voice struggling through all the bourbon in my head. "The spaghetti's too hot, anyway."

She touched my hand and that made me forget the empty bourbon bottle. "You've really tied into one," she said.

I leered the way you can leer only when you're drunk and don't mean it for a leer at all. Petey must have known I was higher than a box kite on a windy day, for she smiled and turned her back to me, finding a zipper on the bathing suit under her right armpit and pulling it down about eight inches. "You turn around too," she said.

I tried. But tomorrow I would give myself up to the cops if I had a change of heart and tonight at least there was Petey and a lot of bourbon making my heart tick off half-seconds much too fast inside my skull. Instead of turning around I followed Petey to the closet and watched her select a robe, filmy and smoke-silver in color, with about the thickness of two or three spider webs plastered together. Then I placed my hands on her shoulders and turned her around.

She pirouetted slowly, the right side of her bathing suit hanging

loosely away from her body where she'd unfastened the zipper. She was bronze and the suit was yellow, but under the suit she was white, all creamy white and curving, with a splash of rose-red on the whiteness, floating like a rose on an inverted cup of cream.

"You're beautiful," I said. "You're beautiful, and you've been so good when you didn't have to be and I don't know why. But I needed every word you said and every gesture and everything you did."

"You're drunk, Fred. Please." She didn't back away. She didn't push me away. I let my hands fall from her shoulders to her supple waist and I pulled her against me.

5.

"Fred. Oh, Fred. I'm not a good samaritan, I never was. I just felt this way about you all along. I'll do anything for you. Anything. I only want . . . what's good for you."

We sat together in the easy chair. Petey had draped herself in the spider-web robe and it tickled against my chest. I thought of the cops outside and the man who had been killed a few Buena Vista cabins away and how I went around forgetting and never knew what I did at those times or why and how I always talked about it because the doctors said not to keep it a secret. Then I figured that was a hell of a lot of foolishness to be

thinking about. It could wait until tomorrow.

"The spaghetti must taste like spaghetti chewing gum by now," Petey said, and laughed.

"I'm not very hungry."

"Liar."

"You're beautiful."

"You said that."

"Very beautiful. Listen. Petey. I'm thinking out loud, see? I'm talking off the top of my head and not really planning, not for good and all . . . but, well, if I killed this guy when I wasn't myself, I . . ."

"You shouldn't get in trouble for it, is that what you mean?"

"I guess. We could do like you said. We could be out of the country by morning, and . . ."

"Fred. Fred, stop. I'd love to."

"Then why should I stop?"

"Just because of that. Because I'd love to, that's why you should stop. It isn't fair to both of us. We'd run away together and at first we'd like it because we're in love, brand new in love and new love has a way of making you forget everything else. But it won't last, not if we have to spend all our lives worrying and wondering if they'll ever find something which will lead to you. After a while we'd start to hate each other and not want to look at each other and . . . no, Fred. It couldn't work."

I smiled and watched her lips trembling. "You're right, I guess. Only now that we . . ."

"I know. It's hard. It isn't right. Yesterday was yesterday and now we have a whole life we want to live together." She got her hand up behind my neck and stroked my hair, slowly. "If it hadn't happened, if this was two or three hours ago I'd have told you to run away, but not now. I'd have figured you're a nice guy and what the hell, you're sick. So run away. A nice guy who did something he wouldn't have done, except he was sick and couldn't help it. You killed Pearson and nothing could bring him back. I would have said to hell with it and run away.

"But not now. Now if you run I want to run with you. We can't have it that way. We just can't." She was talking softly, almost whispering, her lips brushing my ear. "We've got to find another way. This sickness you have, I don't know about it. I'm not a doctor. But if it can be proved you didn't know what you were doing and it won't happen when you're well. . . ."

"The best they'd do for me is lock me up," I said bitterly. "But maybe it is better that way. Jesus, Petey. If I went away with you and it happened again, you might wind up the same way as that guy — what's his name? Jesus, Petey, I wouldn't. . . ."

"Pearson. Walter Pearson. You could never hurt me, Fred. But listen. What if you did give yourself up? Maybe they could cure you. Maybe it's only temporary and some time in a hospital would fix it."

"It's no good. Up north they tried everything."

"They might have something else down here that . . ."

"What did you say?" I stood up. I stood up so fast that Petey rolled off my lap, hit the floor with a thud and sprawled there, the spider-web robe floating open and spreading around her on the dark rug like foam.

She glanced at me in alarm. "I said they might have something else." She averted her eyes. "Fred, take it easy. If that thing is coming over again, I'm right here. I'll watch over you, don't worry. Don't worry, darling, I'm here."

"Before. You said his name. The dead man's name."

"I . . . well, yes. I read it in the paper."

"No. You only saw the headline. You said that twice. You looked at the paper for a couple of seconds and saw nothing but the headline."

I stood up. I crossed the floor and let Petey have a corner of the room to herself. The bourbon drained from me like water rushing to fill a vacuum. I felt cleaned and dirty at the same time and I wished I were a thousand miles away or in the police station surrendering or anyplace.

"I guess I must have seen more. What's the difference?"

"A lot of difference." I didn't want to look at her. I never wanted to look at her again. I'd get sick if I saw her or maybe I'd try to kill her, I didn't know which.

"I met you on the beach yesterday," I said. "We must have talked a long time, and gone swimming and got friendly. If one of these attacks was coming on, I must have talked about it." I stared at the closet, its door swung back against the wall. Most of Petey's clothing was sporty and casual, but some of the stuff in the closet she never wore at all. There were two men's suits and several pairs of slacks, and shoes.

"You'd already planned it then," I said. "If a fall guy came along, all the better."

"What are you . . . talking about?"

"I don't have to tell you." I swallowed hard. She was beautiful, so goddamn beautiful, and she had been so good to me. I needed a friend, I'd cling to one. And she was beautiful. I felt like crying and then maybe hitting her until my hands hurt and I couldn't hit her any more. But I didn't turn around. I stood there staring at the closet and almost wishing I'd gone right on thinking I'd plunged that shiv into Pearson. What the hell, I was sick. No one would be disappointed. No one would stare at a closet and a blank wall and feel like busting out and bawling like a baby.

"Me." I said. "Me. Your patsy. By late afternoon yesterday you must have seen the way I was. It was bad, huh? I walked around in a fog and you probably said that guy's crazy as a loon and boy, does he come in handy."

I heard her starting to get up. I could picture her without looking, on all fours on the rug, the gossamer gown clinging like dew. I couldn't look. I said, "Stay there. If you get up I think I'll kill you."

"Fred." But she stayed put.

"I don't know why you killed Pearson," I said. "I don't give a damn. You killed him, and you had your reason. He's got a wife in Tampa. Maybe you were his mistress and getting plenty from him. Maybe you and your friend, or your husband or somebody — maybe you were blackmailing him and he said he'd go to the cops. I don't give a damn for the reason. You killed him and I was your patsy."

"Fred. You're sick. You're not thinking straight, darling. How can you say that after . . . after. . . ."

"That's what hurts. But shut up. Don't talk about it. I won't touch you. I won't call you names. Just sit there. Don't move. Don't move, Petey. Please."

6.

Outside, I could hear laughter from one of the other cabins and the far sounds of music. I thought the sky would be peppered with stars and back on the beach in St. Augustine the palms would wave in the ocean breeze, serene and graceful and I wished it were raining or snowing and everything around here was ugly and not so beautiful.

"You killed him or your friend

did. Someone, one of you, killed him. I was walking around in a daze. I was perfect. You smeared blood on my shirt and drove off with me and knew I'd get to think about it and want to come back — especially if you felt sorry for me and maybe made a little play."

"Fred. Stop it. You call what happened before . . . a little play?"

"Shut up, I said. That wasn't planned. You wanted to feed me and let me drink a lot and then maybe, after that, go into a clinch and convince me I'd better give myself up. You had all night, there wasn't any hurry. I should have known *El Piscador* wouldn't sport a pay toilet. Jesus, not that place. I should have known. I wasn't thinking. You called your friend here and told him to get the hell away from the cabin, you had to use it with me. But when I followed you to the closet you were afraid I might see his clothing and that would spoil everything. So you decided I might as well take the ball from there."

Everything was suddenly very quiet. Outside, the music and laughing had stopped and I could hear Petey breathing hard. I wondered what she would look like now and I didn't think I would like it. I almost turned around to look, but didn't. I wanted to remember her another way. I wanted to remember the best friend I ever had and all the wild dreams which had flitted through

my thick, empty skull like confetti and thinking about it got me feeling sick. I headed for the door, then changed my mind and went back to the closet, taking out one of his shirts, whoever he was, and putting it on. Then I went to the door.

"What are you going to do?" Her voice was small, completely lacking in expression.

I opened the door. "Not a god-damned thing. I'm going away, that's all."

I heard a noise, a scampering. She was getting up. She was running toward me. Her arms came around my neck from behind and she was panting. She was trying to pull me back into the room.

I swung my left arm behind me and drove her away. I heard her stumble and crash into some furniture and fall to the floor and whimper there. I didn't look back. I wouldn't.

"I'm not going to the cops," I said. "It's none of my business and I don't have any more proof than I said. You and your friend and the cops can fight this thing out yourself."

Outside, a quick tropical rain was falling, drumming on the roofs of the cabin and sending swift little torrents streaming down the sides of the gravel roadway.

I started walking north on U. S. 1 and hoped I'd get a ride before too long.

I didn't look back.

Edward Clark, well-known expert on forgeries and documents, inaugurates Manhunt's newest series of expert articles on criminal practice and police procedures.

Experts In Crime

FORGERY

BY EDWARD CLARK

THE SUSPECT wasn't dumb — he knew just what the police were trying to do. They'd seated him at his own desk at home, had placed a sheet of his wife's light blue stationery paper in front of him, had given him his wife's pen, and were now going to try to prove that he'd written the "suicide" note found next to the body of his wife.

The suspect smiled to himself. He knew he'd forged the note after murdering his wife, but the police would never find that out from him. He'd practised his wife's handwriting until he had it letter perfect, but all he'd have to do now would be to write in his normal hand, and the police wouldn't be able to pin a thing on him.

One of the detectives took a sheet of paper from his pocket, told the suspect to write down what was read to him, and then started dictating. The suspect was puzzled for a moment. This wasn't the suicide note they were asking him to write. It was something entirely different.

He shrugged his shoulders, though, though, and wrote smoothly and confidently.

When he had finished, the detective took the sheet of blue paper away from him, put another in its place on the desk, and started dictating again. It was the same thing they had asked him to write before. He finished the second copy, and then a third sheet of paper was placed in front of him, and he had to write the whole thing all over again.

When the detectives finally allowed him to stop after writing several copies, the suspect had a slight case of writer's cramp, but he was still smug in his satisfaction that the police couldn't prove a thing from his handwriting.

That's where he was wrong.

For one thing, the police were able to show him where certain peculiarities in the shape of the letters "a" and "o" appeared both in the forged suicide note and in his own handwriting. Even more damning,

though, was the fact that, in all the copies he had been asked to write, he had consistently written "good-by" with a final "e" and had written it without the hyphen. By comparing this with a letter his wife had written to her sister some time before her death, the police were able to show him that she always spelled it correctly — "good-by." Needless to say, the suspect had spelled the word in his own way in the suicide note as well as in the texts which the detectives had dictated to him. His confession followed soon after this was pointed out to him.

Trapping a suspected forger in this manner is only one of the many methods the police use when suspicion of forgery or falsifying documents is present. For example, almost everyone knows that the easiest way to copy a signature is to place a sheet of paper over it, hold both sheets against a window pane, and then trace the signature onto the blank sheet. It's a simple method — but it's also one of the easiest to detect. It's now common knowledge that a person never writes his signature the same way twice, so a tracing can quickly be uncovered if the original signature can be had for comparison. Also, when tracing a signature in this manner, the forger cannot write as smoothly and as speedily as a person would when writing normally. Therefore, a certain shakiness will be apparent in the writing, and this, in itself, is enough to indicate possible forgery.

Even if the forger is more professional in his methods and actually practises a signature until it looks like the original, the police can pin the charge of forgery on him. When a person writes his own signature, he usually does it without hesitation and rarely lifts the pen from the paper, except to form certain letters. The forger, on the other hand, will have to stop now and then, lift the pen, and look to see how his work is progressing. Then he puts the pen to the paper and finishes his work. Once he's done this, the strokes of the pen leave marks which indicate to the police that the signature hasn't been written in a normal manner.

A forger will often have to add certain things to a document that has already been written. He may succeed in simulating the handwriting, but if the original document had been folded after writing, the forgery will be immediately apparent to the police. Writing in ink over folded paper, which has been unfolded to allow for additional writing, will show up in the way the ink flows into the folds wherever the writing crosses a crease in the paper.

If the forger has to write over already written material (as in the case of an additional note scrawled across another bit of writing), chemical analysis and microscopic examination can show the police which piece of writing was written first. This, of course, is also important in determining whether words have

been altered, or where an extra line has been inserted into a document and the lower parts of some letters are superimposed over the upper parts of the letters on the line below.

If the forger has erased something previously written, this will show up in the roughened texture of the paper — if a mechanical means such as a razor blade or an eraser has been used to scrape away the writing. If, on the other hand, the forger has used ink eradicator, then ultra-violet light will expose it.

Equally as important as determining forgery is discovering when something was written — in other words, whether a certain part of a document is older than the rest. Through years of experience in analyzing inks, the police are now able to determine approximately how old a sample of ink writing is. After a certain period of time, ink turns very black; then, when it gets even older, it turns a dark brown. Nat-

urally, different coloration of ink on the same document will show that part of it was added later.

If the forger has had to use an ink different than the one used originally on the document, the police can discover this also — even if both inks appear to be the same color to the naked eye and under a microscope. The suspected sheet of paper is smeared with a chemical on the back to make it transparent. Then it's held up with a light shining through the back of it and is photographed twice, each time with a different color filter used on the camera lens. When the pictures are developed, the different types of inks will show up in different colors on both pictures.

The police, then, can use chemistry, photography, psychology, handwriting analysis, physics, and optometry in tracking down forgers. As many forgers have found out — the odds are all with the police.



Tell Them Nothing

A Novelette

BY HAL ELLSON



*I ain't nobody, I'm just a flunkie
— until I get that gun . . .*

I'M WATCHING from the corner when the big green truck swings the corner. Yeah, it's got to slow down. That's all to the good.

Cause down the block is Bullet and Flathead. They're waiting on that truck. Driver's got it in line again, gunning the motor. It's rum-

bling fast, picking up speed. I can see pop bottles on board shining and doing a jig.

There's only one trouble. I ain't really in on this job. I ain't good enough to grab bottles with them.

Truck's coming faster. Bam! This is it. Bullet and Flathead come out

of the doorway like bloodhounds. The truck is speeding now, that load of soda is getting away. It's like they ain't going to make it.

Not much. Bullet's big, got long legs. He closes in fast like that truck ain't moving. Flathead's a real runt with short legs, a jerky way of running, like he's going to fall apart. That don't matter, he's got the stuff.

Both of them hit the back of that truck at the same time. They swing up easy like they always do. Got to work fast now cause that truck is moving.

Yeah, Flathead grabs a case of pop. Bullet slips from the truck. It leaves him behind. He starts pumping, catches up, reaches for the case Flathead hands him.

He got it. Flathead's down from the truck. He flops, and a lady starts screaming to the driver.

Flathead's up, he scoots for a cellar across the street. Brakes screech, the truck stops. Bullet's coming at me with the case of pop.

I take it. He hits for the corner. I bust into the house, break for the cellar, get myself into a bin and hear a door slam open upstairs. Feet pound the hall, come to the cellar door.

I'm shaking like a leaf now. If the guy comes down, it could be my head.

I wait. Nobody comes down them stairs. There's nothing. Yeah, he's listening up there, but I ain't moving, ain't even breathing.

After a while he leaves. I hear

his steps, the hall door close. He's gone and I relax with a cigarette, wait for Bullet and Flathead.

Them studs ain't long in coming. I hear them on the stairs. Bullet whistles and I pop my head out.

"It's okay, nobody going to eat you up," Flathead says, and they both laugh like it's supposed to be a joke.

I come on out all the way. Them two is jiving each other about the job.

"It was nice work," I tell them. "Real smooth the way you done it."

"The way we always do," Flathead says. "We really hit that truck. It was a good score. I just hope you didn't break no bottles."

"I near to busted my neck coming down the stairs. The driver was hot on my tail like he wanted blood. Suppose he came down after me?"

"He'd beat that fat right off your hide, Butterball. Truck drivers like to beat on fat boys."

That ain't funny, I tell Flathead, and he only laughs.

"Yeah, they're real scared," Bullet says. "They don't follow nobody down no cellar in this neighborhood."

Flathead is a little guy with a pushed-in face and flat head, all mouth. He never stops talking. "Anyway, we got the loot," he puts in. "That's what counts. I'm for a cool drink. Who's getting the ice?"

He's looking at me now. So is Bullet. I know what's coming and I start to kick. It don't do me no good.

"Man, we did the real work," Bullet tells me. "Pick up your butt and fetch some ice."

"Just like that?"

"Yeah, just like that."

This time I figure I'm going to argue it out and I can't. I can't stand up to them. Like all the time, I move off like a dog with my tail between my legs. As I go up the stairs I hear them laughing.

2.

Ten minutes later I'm back. I don't make no noise. Yeah, they talking about me down there.

"Once a flunkie, always a flunkie," I hear Flathead say. "That boy don't know from nothing. His momma made a real mistake when he was born."

Bullet laughs on that and says, "He ain't even born. He's got to ripen in the sun a while."

I feel like chucking that ice and leaving, but I don't. I come down the stairs, making plenty of noise. Right off, it starts.

"How much you pay for that chunk of frozen water?" Flathead asks me.

I'm ready for him. "Pay for it? Man, are you crazy? I robbed it from the iceman."

"It ain't too big, but it'll do," Bullet tells me. "You got the can to put it in?"

I put down the ice, go to the bin where the case of soda is stashed, lug it out and get a can and an iron bar.

Next, I chop the ice, put it in the can, push in the bottles.

"Now we all set," Flathead says. "On a hot day you got to have cool nourishment."

"You ain't lying," Bullet tells him back. "That truck was real obliging to us."

We all light up now and wait till them bottles is cool. It ain't too long and we hit them good. All of us is natural-born hogs.

Flathead gets enough. "I'm fit to bust," he says, patting on his stomach. "Look at this."

He's done, so is Bullet. Me, I can swallow pop till the end of the world.

"By myself I can finish that whole case," I tell them.

"Cause you're a fat pig," Flathead says. "But you ain't going to, man. These bottles is counted good."

Bullet is standing now. He wants to know if I got a good place to hide the loot.

"In the bin," I tell him.

"Then put them in. I might get thirsty tonight."

That's an order, so I pick up the case, lug it to the bin and cover it with rags.

"Cool, man, let's move," Flathead says. "There's nothing more to do down here."

We go up the stairs, through the hall and move outside. Yeah, it's real hot, the sun is burning.

"The scene is all dead," Bullet says, looking around. "What's to do?"

"You want to listen to some good

records?" Flathead asks him. "I got some of the latest."

Bullet don't do nothing but yawn and stretch. "Right now," he says to Flathead, "I couldn't listen to nothing without nodding. Maybe I'll go up and hit the pillow."

He looks at both of us now. We ain't got no better suggestion to offer, nothing to say. It's too hot to breathe.

"Yeah, I'm splitting. See you tonight," Bullet says, and he hits the pavement for home.

3.

We watch him go. Then I catch Flathead. He got yellow-like eyes and they slitted now. That pushed-in face don't say what he's thinking.

Finally he turns to me and I smile, cause I do that easy.

"What you smiling at?" he says.

"Nothing special."

"Damn, man, then why you smiling? That don't make sense to me."

I shrug, that's all. What's the use of arguing? Argue and you fight is the way I always figure, but Flathead kind of knows this. I see him look me up and down with them same yellow slit-eyes and nod his head.

"What's wrong now?" I say.

"You ain't nowhere, that's all."

I shrug again. It ain't no use arguing with Flathead cause he can talk anyone's head off.

"Yeah, that's right," he goes on. "You ain't nowhere at all. Added

to that, you're the biggest flunkie around this turf."

"That's opinion."

"Opinion, my butt. That's the truth. Ask anybody around who knows what's happening. You're a flunkie, first class. How you got in with us nobody knows."

He's talking louder, angry-like, so I don't say nothing. This time I don't even shrug, don't show what I'm thinking. He's trying to put me into an argument, and that means a fight. I can't win against him so I turn away.

It's the only thing to do. I take in the street. It's like it's hotter now, that pavement ready to melt. It's a long time till evening, and I feel empty as the street. There's nothing for me cause I'm too fat and easy-going. Yeah, I'm nothing but a flunkie. Flathead's right on that.

"You got nothing to say?" he asks me now.

"Nothing," I tell him.

"Like I thought. You got no guts to talk up for yourself. Man, I'd rather be dead than be like you."

He's satisfied now, had his say, so he lights up and moves off like he owns the street. I watch him go and even now I don't hate that boy. He so small but he act like he's real big. Wish I could be like that, but that can't happen.

He turns the corner and is out of sight. I look at the street again. It's all burning up, there ain't nothing here. There's nothing nowhere.

I turn around and go up the stairs. Nobody's home. Every window's open but it's hot as hell in the house. I go to my bed and lay down to nap.

4.

It's late when I open my eyes. There's a wind off the river chasing the heat from the house.

Nobody home yet. I get up, hit for the kitchen and investigate the icebox. Milk is there. I empty a container in three gulps like it ain't nothing.

That's enough. I ain't hungry no more. I'm more anxious to be outside. It's getting dark, shadows coming through the streets.

It's best to be down there cause it's real. Things is always happening in the streets, especially after dark. All kinds of excitements. I figure tonight can't be no different from any other summer night.

Already I can hear noises you don't hear in the day. They make like music if you listen good. Later, they get louder like they talking to you, promising you something. I keep listening till I remember what happened earlier.

Yeah, Flathead called me a flunkie. The trouble is I am one, cause I can't fight, can't stand up for my rights. Everybody around knows that.

But there's got to be a way to make them look up. Suppose I challenged Bullet to a fair one and whipped his butt?

I'm still thinking like that when I hear steps on the stairs. Somebody coming up. He reaches the last landing and starts for the roof.

Them steps is heavy and slow like a man's. They don't belong to the super cause I know his step well. This boy is somebody else and he got trouble climbing, like he's carrying something heavy.

Yeah, what? I moved to the door, open it and peek. The man is out of sight, still moving up.

I open the door wider, tiptoe to the stairway and see a man climbing funny. It's like he's blind and feeling his way.

Light's still coming through the dirty skylight, falling like dust. I see that man like a shadow moving up and I'm scared now.

Next second, I know who it is. It's that wino, Three-Star. He used to be a pug, now he fights in the gutter and lives in a cellar around the corner.

I'm curious cause he never comes up here to roost. Yeah, something's in the wind. I watch him all the way to the top where he hits the door with his shoulder and bangs it open.

He just stands there then with the sky behind him getting darker. I duck back behind the wall and wait till I hear the roof-door close.

Another time I wouldn't follow, cause it's safer to keep clear of Three-Star. But I'm thinking of what Flathead said today. I'm a flunkie. Okay, maybe I can prove different now. Maybe Three-Star

is going to chuck himself off the roof, and maybe I can save him.

Yeah, but that can't be. It ain't ever going to happen, but I'm still curious. I want to know what business Three-Star got on my roof.

There's only one thing to do, follow him up. I start to climb, reach the door and I'm froze. Maybe Three-Star is waiting behind the door to grab me.

I'm ready to run, but I stop myself. There's no sound from the roof and that's a good sign.

I touch the doorknob, open the door a little, look through the crack and see Three-Star halfway across the roof.

He ain't in any hurry. Beside that, he don't seem to know where he's going. Finally he weaves to the roof-edge where the cornice sticks up.

Maybe he's going to take a dive. I want to dash out and save him, but I'm scared to move. I just stand there and watch.

He's leaning forward, fumbling around like he's looking for something. Then he stands, pulls something from his pocket and leans forward again.

5.

When he straightens, I see his hand is empty. He turns around slow, starts for the roof-door and, Bam! it happens. My heart stops beating cause he's coming at me all of a sudden.

I'm froze, can't move, he's going to get me, I'm thinking. He knowed all the while that I was watching. But I'm wrong on that, cause he only stumbled.

He catches himself, straightens up. That's that wine in his brain. He don't know he's alive.

I take my hand from the door, let it close soft, race down the stairs and swing into my apartment.

After that I wait. It takes time, then I hear steps on the stairs. They come down slow. It's dark in the hall now, no light at all. I hear Three-Star stop, and I wait.

Maybe he's going back on the roof. But he don't go back. He just waits there. Maybe he's trying to find a butt to light. He's so blind he can't find himself. After a while he starts down the stairs, stops at the landing, then goes on.

I'm still listening behind the door. When I figure it's safe I come out on the landing and look down. There's nothing to see, but I can follow him down from flight to flight with my ears. Way down on the bottom I hear a door close and he's out in the street.

That don't mean he's gone. I cool it and wait, then hit for the roof on my toes. I'm still scared.

It's darker now, cooler. Soon as that night wind touches me I know I'm full of sweat. I shake off the chill and hurry across the roof to the spot where I seen Three-Star fumbling.

Quick as lighting I find a hole

in the conice. It ain't nothing to reach in, but nothing's there. I feel around, keep feeling. When I'm ready to quit my hand touches something hard and I know right off it's a gun.

Man, that's real scaring. I leave it there, pull out my hand and look around to see if anybody's watching. Nobody is.

I reach in again and grab. That gun is wrapped neat in a rag. I don't want to move. Next second I'm running for the roof-door.

It don't take nothing to get down the stairs. I close my door after me, lock it good and unwrap the gun. Damn, my hand's shaking. Can't hold the piece straight. I got to lay it down on the table and wait before I pick it up again.

My hand's still shaking cause this ain't nothing ordinary to own. Get a gun and you can kill. It don't matter how big he is, you can stop anybody.

Soon as I think of that, I see Three-Star's face before me. Suppose he finds out about this? I'm almost scared enough to go back on the roof and put the gun in its hole. I'm ready to do it when I remember Flathead.

Yeah, what'll he do if I throw this on him? I know already and I shove the gun in my pocket, move for the door, run down the stairs. Somebody's in for a real surprise, I'm thinking.

I bust out the door and catch myself now. It don't do to run, or

show excitement. I have to cool it, walk slower. I'm watching for Flathead. He's got to be somewhere on the scene.

On the next block I hit an alley and Flathead comes at me out of the shadows.

"Hey, flunkie, where you heading?" he says.

I stop in my tracks, hot and excited again, but I don't show him nothing on my face. All the same, he's got his coming sooner than he knows.

"Man, I talked to you," he says. "I'm expecting an answer."

"I ain't headed nowhere," I tell him.

"Yeah, you're always lost."

I take that without saying nothing and wait for the happenings cause they got to come.

"Let's go down your cellar," he tells me now. "I feel in need of a drink."

I been waiting for that, so I turn. We head back for my house, reach it and go down the cellar stairs.

I still don't know what I'm going to do. That's the trouble, I didn't plan and now I'm scared of what can happen. Suppose Three-Star finds out I got his gun? Suppose I show it and word gets back to him?

"Okay, stupid, get the soda out. Don't stand there looking at me so dumb."

I'm still staring at Flathead, and no longer thinking about Three-Star. Them words hurt, make me mad.

I know what I'm going to do now. I got to do it, so I go to the bin. He's got to be shown. This is it. I can be bigger than he is. We going to see who's a flunkie and who ain't.

Soon as I'm in the bin, I turn and pull the gun. Yeah, my hand's shaking. I tighten my grip and call Flathead.

"What's wrong with you now?" he says, but he comes to the bin and stops dead in his tracks when I throw the gun on him.

"Yeah, you're always messing up with me. Now I got the drop on you," I tell him, and his eyes is half out of his head. He can't say nothing. This gun is real stuff and he knows it.

"Now it's my turn," I go on, and that's a feeling, talking like that to him, cause I got him stopped dead and he knows it. It's the other way around, I'm big and he's smaller than a toad.

"Your turn for what?" he says in a squeaky voice I don't know.

"For whatever I feel like doing."

"Man, I'm sorry. I never did mean nothing more than words. You know I'm your friend."

"You are?"

Yeah, just cause I jive you all the time . . ."

I laughed on that. Damn, this boy is really scared to death and I got him where I want him. Revenge is sweet, but I have enough so I point the gun at the floor and step from the bin.

That don't help Flathead. He's still scared and he watched me like he's figuring I'm up to a trick. Then he laughs.

"Man, I thought you was meaning that," he says. "For a second you almost had me scared."

"You wasn't?"

"Hell, no."

"You looked ready to fall on your face."

"Cause I wasn't expecting nothing like that. Walk into a cannon and you got to feel something. It's a natural reaction. Where'd you get that pistol?"

"I got it, that's all."

"It's the real thing, ain't it?"

"What do you think?"

"It looks real. You got it loaded?"

"It's loaded."

"You want to let me feel it? I never did get to hold a real one."

"That's tough on you, cause you ain't going to feel this one."

"You mean you don't trust me?"

I shook my head and showed him my teeth. Giving him the needle is real enjoyment cause he can't come back at me. He's just mouth, but he's got to try to bluff it.

"I could take it off you," he tells me like they do in the movies. It's real cool, but it don't work on me now.

"Go ahead and try," I say. That's all, and he don't try. Got a funny look in his eye now, a sly grin comes on his face.

"What's that for?" I ask.

"You want to know something?"

"I'm listening."

"I'll tell you, I didn't know you had it in you. That's the truth. Want to know something else?"

"Spill it."

"You ain't no flunkie after all."

Hearing that, I got to smile. But somebody comes in the hall upstairs. We both listen. Steps come to the cellar door, and I shove the gun in my pocket.

6.

"Who's that?" Flathead calls out.

"King of the Egyptians. What punk wants to make something out of it?"

That's nobody but Bullet. He comes down the stairs, looks at us and says, "What you two doing here? Hitting into that soda pop without me?"

We don't answer. I play it cool, light a cigarette and grin like a cat.

"What you cooking?" Bullet asks, cause he knows something's wrong now. "What's the deal?"

It's time to act. I blow a cloud of smoke first, then reach for the gun and hold it like it ain't nothing.

"Man, where'd you get that?"

"I'm through with zip-guns," I tell him. "From now on in it's only the real thing for me."

"How'd you come by that piece?"

"I got it from a friend."

"Man, you ain't got no friends like that. Where'd you find that pistol?"

I'm smiling back at him, cause I

know he's real impressed with the situation. But I got to play it bigger.

"You want to handle it?" I ask him.

"Yeah, let's see it."

"Nay, man. Not unless you want to buy it, and you ain't got the price."

That stops him cold. I see him look at me new. But like Flathead he's got to bluff.

"I could bust you down and take it off you," he tells me.

But words don't work now. The gun is in my hands. The safety catch is on. For kicks, I tell him it's off and I throw the gun on him.

That's it. Maybe he's the President of the gang and the wildest cat around this turf, but he ain't nothing to me now when I got the gun on him. He ain't busting me down, ain't even trying.

I wait, give him a chance and then say, "I thought you was going to take it?"

He looks doubtful at me to see if I'm playing. Maybe he thinks I am, but he's taking no chances.

Yeah, I got him, too, like I got Flathead. Neither of them has the guts to try me out. That's real satisfying.

Bullet scratches his head and looks at Flathead. They both grinning now.

"He's a cool stud, ain't he?" Flathead says.

"Yeah, real cool."

Bullet looks at me like Flathead

did before, with respect. That's something, coming from the President.

"Man, how'd you come by it?" he asks me.

"I got it, I know people, too, so don't worry about where this gun came from."

I tell him that, and that's all he's going to know cause I got to protect myself from Three-Star.

"Okay, that's your business, man."

"You took the words out of my mouth."

He laughed on that. So did Flat-head. Me, I'm smiling cause the situation is all mine. Both of these boys is looking up to me like I'm somebody now.

I slip the gun in my pocket, and that's disappointing. Bullet asks to see it.

"I just want to have a look," he tells me. "I ain't going to eat it up."

Maybe it's a trick. I don't know, but I got to take the chance. After all, he's the President. If I don't show him the piece, he'll figure he's got me.

It's best to keep playing it cool, so I let him have it. It's like I handed him a hunk of pure uranium. That boy weighs it, lifts it up and squints down the barrel.

"This sure is a pretty pistol," he says. "I mean that, it's real pretty."

"You finished admiring it now?"

"Not yet. I like the feel of iron in my hand."

"Yeah, but don't get to like it so much, cause it's got my name on it already."

"Okay, man, I ain't going to eat it, so don't get hot."

"I just like to take care of my own property, see what I mean?"

"Yeah, I see." Bullet lifted the gun and took aim. "Real pretty. This is the McCoy."

"You done with it?" I put out my hand to take it and he steps back.

"Butterball, suppose you lend me this pistol?"

"Nothing doing. It might not come back."

"Don't worry about it. Ain't I your buddy?"

"Yeah, but what you want with that pistol?"

"I got use for it."

"What use?"

"That's kind of private. Let's say I need it for a while and let it go at that."

"Let's say I need it, too."

"You ain't willing to lend it to the President of the club?"

I don't know what to say now. Handing him that gun was the wrong thing to do. I knew that from the beginning. He's club President and going to make an issue of it. Beside that, he knows he can beat me flat. It's best to be on his good side, but if I let him take the gun, I'm back where I started, still a flunkie.

So I shake my head. "Sorry, man," I say, "but I got to hold it."

"I'm only asking to borrow it."

"I know."

"Are you thinking I might be keeping it?"

"Did I say that?"

"It sounds pretty much like it, boy."

"That's opinion. Let's have the gun."

"Suppose I don't give it?"

He's got me stopped, but only for a second cause I play it cool again. "It just happens that gun ain't all paid for yet," I tell him, and along with that I give him a real lie. I say I bought it from a big guy in the poolroom, a real wild stud. He knows who I mean.

"Suppose I tell him you took that gun from me?" I say.

That does it. He hands back the gun and I shove it away. The bluff wins hands down. We're all tight again, real friendly-like.

The three of us go up the stairs, hit the street and it's like I own it now from end to end.

7.

A couple of days later Jiggs comes around. He's a real rough cat, President of the Swordsmen, a brother club of ours with a bigger gang.

It got to him that I have a pistol. Right off, he puts it to me. He wants to borrow that gun bad.

"I got to talk to you," he says. "Want to step outside?"

We're in the candy store, so we move out to the sidewalk.

"It's like this," he explains. "We're fighting the Red Feathers uptown, you know that."

"Yeah, I heard you was still warring with them cats."

"So I need a pistol. I know you got one. I'm only asking to borrow it."

Right there I hesitate. Me and Jiggs is tight and knows each other for a long time, but something tells me not to part with the gun. This boy is giving me a story.

"We're going to have it out tonight," he goes on. "I want to dish it out bad to them Red Feathers. You going to let me have it?"

I'm still hesitating, but this is a big cat and he's coming to me for the first time in his life for a favor. That makes me feel big, and I fall.

"Okay," I tell him, "you can have it, but I want it back by tomorrow or I'm coming to get it."

"Tonight is all I want it for, man. Tomorrow will be history."

"All right, you want to come along? I ain't carrying it on me."

We go to my cellar. I let him have it and he takes off for his own neighborhood.

8.

Next day I don't see Jiggs. He don't show his face around, so I move over to his neighborhood and ask for him. He ain't been seen, but I hear about the rumble. The Swordsmen had it out with the Red Feathers and Jiggs was in on it.

Otherwise, they don't know nothing at all.

I hit back for the neighborhood, with a bad feeling. That gun is gone, I'm thinking, but I got to get it back.

Three days later I caught up with Jiggs, found him outside the pool-room where he usually hangs out. He's with some of his boys, so I wait for the right moment and call him aside.

"What's on your brain?" he asks me like he owes me nothing.

"Look, man, it's about the gun. You used it and I'm ready to take it back."

"Yeah, I know, but I ain't finished with it. I got a private score to settle with somebody."

"Nay, man."

"Be reasonable. Soon as I settle up, you get the gun."

"When will that be?"

"It depends."

"On what?"

"When I catch up with this other cat."

"Suppose you don't catch up with that other cat?"

"He ain't fast enough for me not to catch him. I got to, so don't get yourself in a fuss about that pistol. I'm taking good care of it."

He jived me on that and I let it pass, told him he could hold it a while. But that's no good, cause he don't show like he said he would.

I have to go around and see him again. I'm just coming out of the house when Jiggs shows at the door.

"Man, I thought you was never coming back with my piece," I tell him right off.

That goes right over his head. "We had it out again last night with the Red Feathers," he tells me.

"Yeah? How'd it go?"

"It was all right while it lasted, but it didn't last too long."

"What happened?"

"Somebody called the cops."

"That happens. You got the pistol?"

"That's what I'm coming to."

"What does that mean?"

"I ain't got it."

"What you mean, you ain't got it? Man, I gave it to you, you got to have it."

"I ain't. That's what I'm trying to tell you."

"If you're trying to jive me, you better quit, cause I ain't in the mood for no freakish stuff."

"Man, it's straight, I ain't got it. Them cops caught me last night and busted me down."

"So how come you're here?"

"They busted me down for the pistol. That's why they let me go. I'm sorry, man, but that's the way it is."

"That's the way it is nothing. It couldn't happen like that, not if they got you with a pistol."

"But that's what did happen. I got proof for it. They nailed me good and I had to cough up that gun."

"Nay, you can't tell me like that, cause when they got you for a gun, they just bust you and then bust

you again and forget to let you go.”

“Then where’s the gun?”

“That’s what I want to know, man. Where is it, cause I want it.”

Jiggs shrugged his shoulders. “What I ain’t got I can’t give. I’m sorry, man.”

That’s it. He’s not giving it, and I can’t take it from him, but it’s my own fault. I was stupid for lending it.

“Next time them Red Feathers could be crawling up the side of your head and you wouldn’t get a cap pistol from me,” I tell him. “Remember that, man.”

“I know. It was my fault, but maybe I can make it up.”

“How? You going to get me another gun? That’s what I consider making it up.”

“I’ll see what I can do. I might pick up something. You never can tell.”

“Yeah, you never can tell,” I say and the conversation ended there. I went my way and Jiggs went his.

9.

That same afternoon I walked around and picked up the details of the gang-battle from others who was in it. I learned what I knew I would, that Jiggs wasn’t caught by no police.

That kind of figured. He made up the story to keep my gun. I got to get it back, but I don’t know how.

Just when I’m figuring it’s a dead

issue, word gets around like it always does. My boys hear about the gun and who’s got it.

Right off, Bullet and Flathead get on me about it. They come up the house and, when I let them in, I see it in their faces. Flathead’s just mouth, but Bullet’s real sore.

“So you gave that stud the gun you wouldn’t lend me,” he says. “Damn, it’s good you lost it for being so greedy.”

I ain’t saying nothing to that. What can I answer? All the way through he’s right.

“Yeah, we heard,” Flathead says. “But what you intend doing about it?”

“About what?”

“You know what. What’s wrong, you punking out and letting him take that pistol?”

I tell them the story Jiggs gave me. It’s a lie, I know it and they know it.

“Believe that and you believe in Santa Claus,” Bullet says. “You ain’t going to take back that gun?”

I look at him and at Flathead. Things is different between us now. I can feel it.

“What can I do?” I say. “I can’t take what he ain’t got.”

Them two look at each other and smile. Then Flathead steps in, chest out like he’s cock-of-the-walk again. He shoves that pushed-in ugly old face up at me, taps me on the chest and says, “We was figuring different about you, but that was a mistake. What we used to think still holds.”

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"That you is still a no-good flunkie and nothing else but."

"Yeah, you punked out, you let that Jiggs bluff you for the gun," Bullet tells me. "Water runs in your blood."

"So?"

"So you ain't with us no more. We don't need you around."

That makes it desperate for me. I'm going to be out of the gang and I can't afford that.

"Okay, what do you want me to do?" I ask.

"Get that gun back. Don't get it back and you walk the plank."

"Yeah, easy to say, but that Jiggs is a rough old cat."

"He ain't nothing."

"You think so?"

"I know so."

"Okay, then let's see if you can take it off him."

"I can, but that dirty work belongs to you."

"Sounds like you're punking out, too."

I tell him that and he don't like it. Behind that, Flathead is grinning like he knows I scored good.

"Yeah, he hit you, man. He hit," Flathead says. "He put you on it, Bullet. You walked right in like the fly in the molasses."

Bullet is seeing red now. "What you meaning, walked right in?" He's ready to swing out on Flathead but he don't.

"Okay, so Jiggs is a rough cat," he admits. "Getting that gun can't

be easy. But he's laughing up his sleeve. All his boys'll be laughing when it gets around. It'll be like we're punks, and that don't go down my craw."

I'm waiting for him to say like that. "Okay, man, that's the case, we get together and take it from him."

Flathead's grinning again. He looks at Bullet and says, "Brain-matter. This boy has it."

"Yeah, only one thing, we got to catch Jiggs right. He's a cool customer and you don't play round with him. It's got to be done real business-like."

The three of us agree on that and talk it out, make a plan. That don't say it's going to work, but we're going to try, and that Jiggs better watch out from now on in.

10.

A couple of days pass and we get set for the business. I get up, don't bother to eat, leave the house and walk to the corner. Bullet and Flathead is waiting.

"This is it," they say.

I know what they mean. We have a small punk watching on Jiggs for days now, telling us what he does, where he goes.

We got him placed where it'll do the most good. Got to move fast. We move, hit for Jiggs' house.

Soon as we reach there we stop and exchange the last words. It's all set and I'm sweating blood.

Jiggs is up at the roof-door. None of his boys is around. I got to meet him and talk that pistol back. If he don't listen, the three of us are going to do him in.

Yeah, but I got the hard job. Got to face him alone. Bullet and Flathead hit for the next house and go in. I give them a lead so they can reach the roof before me, then I move into Jiggs' house.

Soon as I start climbing steps I hear whistling overhead. Jiggs is up there feeling happy. In ten seconds he ain't going to be so happy.

I climb on up till he sees me. That whistling stops. He's looking down.

"Hey, man, look what's coming. The coolest cat in the world."

"This cat ain't so cool this morning, and he ain't in no mood to be jived," I tell him.

"Sounds like your momma throwed you out without breakfast this morning."

I stop halfway up the last flight and tell him, "Never mind about my mother. This ain't the first time I told you let her out of conversation with me."

"Okay, man, she's out. Does that satisfy?"

"Half."

"What's the other half?"

"I came for the gun. I have to have it."

He smiles on that. "Man, I told you what happened with it."

"You told me a fast lie, cause we had somebody on you. You was seen

with the piece. What's more, cops didn't bust you down. It all adds up. I got to have it, and you got to give it."

"I got to do nothing. That spells the same any way you say it."

"Brother, that don't go down. It's my property and I got to have it."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

"Okay, since you making an issue and talking so big, since you saying your piece, I'll say mine. That pistol is gone. It was yours, but it ain't no more."

"You're sure on that?"

"I'm most sure."

"Sounds like we got a disagreement but we ain't, cause I'm here for the gun."

"How you figure to get it?"

"I'm going to take it."

He laughs on that. "You ain't taking nothing. No punk stud like you can, cause you ain't nothing but a roll of fat."

Maybe I am, but I got Bullet and Flathead with me. He don't know we got him trapped. They're on the roof, going to catch him from behind.

"Yeah," I say real loud so they can hear, "you talking big right now, but talk is all you is."

That sends him. He's up on his feet, and that's when I figure Bullet and Flathead's going to move in.

It don't happen that way at all. Behind that, Jiggs whips out the gun and throws it on me.

"Yeah, here it is," he says. "You want to come and get it, try. Try and see what happens. I'll blast your fat head off and shove this pistol down your throat till it hits bottom."

Looking into that gun, I'm scared. Maybe he ain't going to do nothing, but why take a chance? His trigger finger could be nervous.

I'm beat and I know it so I tell him, "I thought you was a good guy."

"Yeah, good to myself, nobody else. That's my philosophy."

"Okay, but there's always a next time. Next time you ask, you don't get nothing. You could roll in the gutter and die."

He laughs on that and says, "You finished talking, fat boy?"

"Only to you. I'm going to spread it around what kind of friend you happen to be. I'll tell everybody, and nobody'll lend you the right time after this."

"That's your business, but when they find you in an alley with a busted head, your momma and daddy is going to cry hard for you. Think hard on that before you spread the word about this here pistol."

"You ain't scaring me with no words," I tell him, but I start backing down the stairs.

"They ain't words. Try me out if you think they are."

I reach the landing and call back, "I might be doing that." That does it. He pushes that gun out. He's

fit to bust, maybe he's going to blast me but I can't run. Sweat's dripping down my face. I'm praying he don't shoot when I see a shadow move against the open door behind him.

Bullet steps in from the roof. That's it.

"Don't move or you be dead," he says.

Jiggs ain't moving, but Flathead shows now.

"Take that gun from him," Bullet orders.

Flathead does what he says. Jiggs is shaking now, scared to death.

I come up the steps two at a time and meet them all at the top.

Jiggs turns around. That's when the laughing busts out, cause all Bullet had on him was a lead pipe stuck in his back.

We got the gun now. Jiggs is looking fit to be sick when he sees what happened.

"Next time," Bullet tells him, "you make sure you give back what you borrow from anybody in our club."

Jiggs ain't got no answer on that, so we leave him be and go down the stairs. In the vestibule Flathead hands me back my gun. I shove it away, we move on out, and everything's like it was before.

II.

I kept that pistol good, hid it down the cellar in a hole I made in the wall. Most of the times that's where it stays, wrapped in a rag.

Near the end of summer we start having trouble with the Red Feathers. They're fooling with our girls and we don't like that. Next thing, we meet at a dance and clash. Police break it up, and next day we declare war on each other.

The following night I'm riding a stolen car into Red Feather territory with six of our clique.

I got the pistol ready for work, but nobody shows his face. We hunted for them other punks all over and find nobody.

That don't mean nothing. Later the same night we're back and looking some more. The result is the same. No Red Feathers is to be found.

But cops is around. Bullet spotted them first. "Better ride out of it," he says. "They're looking for trouble. Could be them other punks called them."

The following night we come back looking for Red Feathers. We drive slow and watch good. Everybody got a feeling it's going to be different tonight.

Me, I'm sure of that. I got that pistol in my lap. All day I been talking what I'm going to do when we meet the Red Feathers.

Now I'm scared. Something's going to happen. I know that for sure.

The car moves on, turns a corner and everything busts wide open cause we see them halfway down the block, a bunch of them enemy cats standing in a doorway.

Bullet gives the word to step on

the gas. We flying now, riding down on them. They're in the doorway, looking up. They know the happenings right off and start to scatter.

It's too late. My hand feels numb but I lift it, fire the gun, keep pulling the trigger.

It's over in seconds. We hit the corner. An old man steps from the curb, and a lady screams. That scream goes through me like a sharp piece of ice, but it's all right. The old man stumbles back. We miss him and swerve like crazy around the corner and race for the next.

"Make it faster," somebody in the back says. "I hear sirens."

All of us is scared now. I'm up front and I see the boy at the wheel. He's sweating gallons, real scared, but he takes us out of it like witches is after him, brings us back to our territory and we ditch the car.

It's over now and I feel better, catch myself. "Yeah, I got one of them punks," I tell the others. "I know I did cause I heard him scream."

The others agree with me, but nobody really knows if I scored a hit. It don't matter. The raid in itself is enough. We scattered them good, put fear in them.

But we got to bust up now. Patrol cars'll be cruising around soon, looking for us. They won't find us.

12.

Next afternoon I'm just getting ready to leave the house when the

police arrive. Soon as I hear steps on the stairs I know who they are. It's too late to run, useless. I decide to bluff it out.

A knock sounds on the front door. That scares me and I look toward the back of the house, figure to bust for the fire escape. I can do it, but it ain't worth the chance. Cops could be watching it.

There's another knock now and I say, "Who is it? What you want?"

That guy behind the door announces himself. I don't catch the name but I recognize the voice. It's a detective who knows me good.

I don't want to open up but I got to. There's nothing else I can do, so I walk to the door, wait a second, then swing it open.

Two dicks is there. Marro and McMellon. I know them both. Marro steps in quick and shoves me back.

"Anyone else here?" he asks.

"No, I'm by myself. What you looking for?"

He looks back at me bad, like he don't care for the question and wants to knock it back down my throat. He don't do it. Instead, he says, "Where's the gun?"

"What gun?"

He looks at me bad again, don't like my manner. "You know what gun I'm talking about," he says, and his hand comes up. I take it hard across the face.

"Do that again and I'm going to punch you in the mouth," I tell him.

"You're going to do what?"

His other hand whips up. This

time I get it harder. Behind that, McMellon moves in and kicks me in the leg.

I'm not so wild after that. My head is ringing, and my leg is like broke.

"Did you have enough?" Marro asks. "Or would you like some more, tough-guy?"

I don't answer, don't even look at them.

"That's a little better," Marro goes on. "Now start moving. You're coming with us and we're going to find out what happened to that gun."

I know right off what's going to happen. This ain't a first occasion for me. "Okay," I say like I'm ready to go but only because I feel like it.

"Start moving, and no monkey business."

"Sure, but let me get my cigarettes first."

"You better forget them. Where you're going, you won't have time to smoke."

Hearing that, I want to fight back again. The hell with both of them. I start to back away, but they grab me, hustle me through the door, down the stairs and finally boot me into their car.

Five minutes later I enter the precinct. A detective turns at the desk as they bring me in.

"What have you got him for?" he asks.

"The usual thing — shooting," Marro tells him.

"Another cowboy, hey? Give him

the rubber hose and maybe he won't think he's so tough."

They laugh on that like it's real funny, and I know what's coming next. I figured it from the second the dicks knocked on the door. They never used the hose on me before. Yeah, but there's always a first time.

I'm scared just thinking about that. I heard tell about the hose. It don't leave no marks, but pulps your insides. The bulls can beat you to death with it and your own mother wouldn't know anyone touched you.

"Let's go."

I hear that and freeze, got no mind to listen. The door is behind me. I look and get ready to break for it when they grab me and hustle me to the stairs.

For a second I want to fight back. I got a crazy idea I can escape, but I catch myself. If I break away, they got an excuse to beat me flat to the floor.

It's best to go up. They go with me to the second floor.

13.

Once I'm in the detectives' room they let me loose. They're in no hurry now. Yeah, they move aside, talk in whispers, laugh and don't even look at me. It's like I ain't here no more.

Finally I hear Marro say, "We might as well take off our jackets. It may get kind of warm in here."

"Kind of," McMellon says with a grin.

They take off their jackets, sit down and light up. I'm kept standing. A cigarette is offered.

I refuse it cause I know that trick from before. The first time I fell for it, they slapped it from my mouth. Now I don't want nothing from them. They're all alike, ready to bust you down.

Refusing that cigarette don't disturb them at all. They forget me, smoke, talk about another boy they brung up here. He wouldn't talk so they whaled him and sent him back downstairs half-dead.

I'm listening and familiar with this, too. They trying to soften me up, make me nervous. Yeah, but they ain't got me. Let them talk, let them beat me dead and I still won't give them what they want.

The dicks finally stop talking. Marro turns his head, stares at me. Smoke drifts across his face from his cigarette. He got no expression, nothing in his eyes, but I ain't fooled. He's ready now.

He's going to start pounding. The fooling's over, this is it.

Marro takes the butt from his mouth, squashes it, leans back, tips his chair on two legs till it touches the wall.

"Where's the gun?" he asks me soft-like.

"I don't know what you're talking about. I don't know nothing about no gun," I tell him back.

On that, he jerks his body, the

chair tips forward, comes down on all four legs. He plants his hands flat on the desk, raises himself slow. His brow is wrinkled. He's real mad, bigger-looking, like he's blowing up from inside.

I figure he's going to fly, but he comes at me real slow. Next second he changes. I hardly see his fist come up. It explodes in my face and I'm flat to the floor.

"Where's the gun, you little son of a bitch?" he says.

I don't answer. I try to get up. Something tells me I got to show them. Marro blows his stack on that, hits me again and knocks me to the floor.

"So you're a tough boy?" he says. "You're going to show me, huh? Lots of punks tried and didn't succeed."

I look up from the floor. That second punch did me in. I can't think straight, and I'm scared to death. What's coming next?

I get my answer a second later when McMellon lets me have it in the ribs.

"Where's the gun?" Marro asks again.

I feel a tickling sensation on my face and lift my hand. Blood's on it. My cheekbone's gashed.

"Where's the gun?"

I hear that again and yell out, "I don't know, I don't know!" but they keep on at me till the sergeant comes up from below.

He's a tall thin man with a long nose. I'm on the floor when he

enters. This is another to beat me, I'm thinking.

But I'm wrong. The sergeant takes one look at me and stops them. Marro and McMellon look at him bad, but they let up on me.

"Get up on your feet," Marro says.

When I don't move, both of them grab me, jerk me up, tear my shirt. They shove me stumbling to the door.

I go through, move to the stairs, reach it. I'm afraid to go down cause my legs is like made of paper. But at least there's no more questions and no more blows. They give me the order and I go down the stairs.

When I reach the floor below I stop. They going to start asking questions again, work me over. They ain't used the hose yet. Yeah, that sergeant tricked me. They got me down here to take me back up. That's how they going to break me.

But it don't happen that way. I'm taken outside and ordered into the car. Marra and McMellon follow me in. They drive back to the corner of the block where I live, let me go and tell me next time it'll go harder, they'll break every bone in my body.

14.

I go on home, wash, change my clothes and come down to the street. The dicks is gone, but I got an uncomfortable feeling that it ain't all over with me. They going to be

watching me good from now on in.

Okay, they didn't use the hose. I was lucky, cause they didn't intend to use it. If they get me with the gun, it's going to be different.

I think of that and all the trouble that gun caused. Man, I should have let it be where it was. Suppose I killed somebody the other night? Damn, I'm scared of that pistol, got to do something about it.

I hit for the cellar, get the gun out of the hole, pack it away and head for the river. It's a good walk. I reach there, look around. The scene is empty, nobody around. Plop! That gun goes down in the deep. Now it can't do nobody harm.

I feel better already, like I'm free, but on the way back to the neighborhood I start to wonder. Without the gun I ain't nobody no more. They going to ride me, call me a flunkie again.

A bunch of boys is on the corner. They greet me as I come up. Somebody seen the dicks bring me back, so they all know I been picked up and questioned. The gash on my face proves it.

Questions come at me, everybody starts talking at once. Flathead is loudest, telling them to give me a chance to answer.

Yeah, it feels good. They all looking up at me like I'm a hero. Them blows and kicks is forgotten quick. It was nothing at all.

"Yeah, they picked me up," I say. "It was Marro and McMellon. They brought me into the precinct for questioning about the gun."

"Did they bust you down?" Flathead asks. "Man, you look beat to the bone."

"Bust me down, hell. I told them nothing at all."

"Then they didn't get the gun?"

"They got nothing. I ain't the talking type." I'm feeling great, real big when I see their faces, the way they look at me. I ain't no flunkie, that's for sure. I'm just a bad cat.

Can't resist now. "Yeah," I tell them, "they tried to beat me and I fought back with both fists. It took five bulls to put me down, but I still got the gun and they don't know nothing more than they ever did."



The Hunter

Wegers was a lady-killer. The newspaper clippings he carried proved that . . .

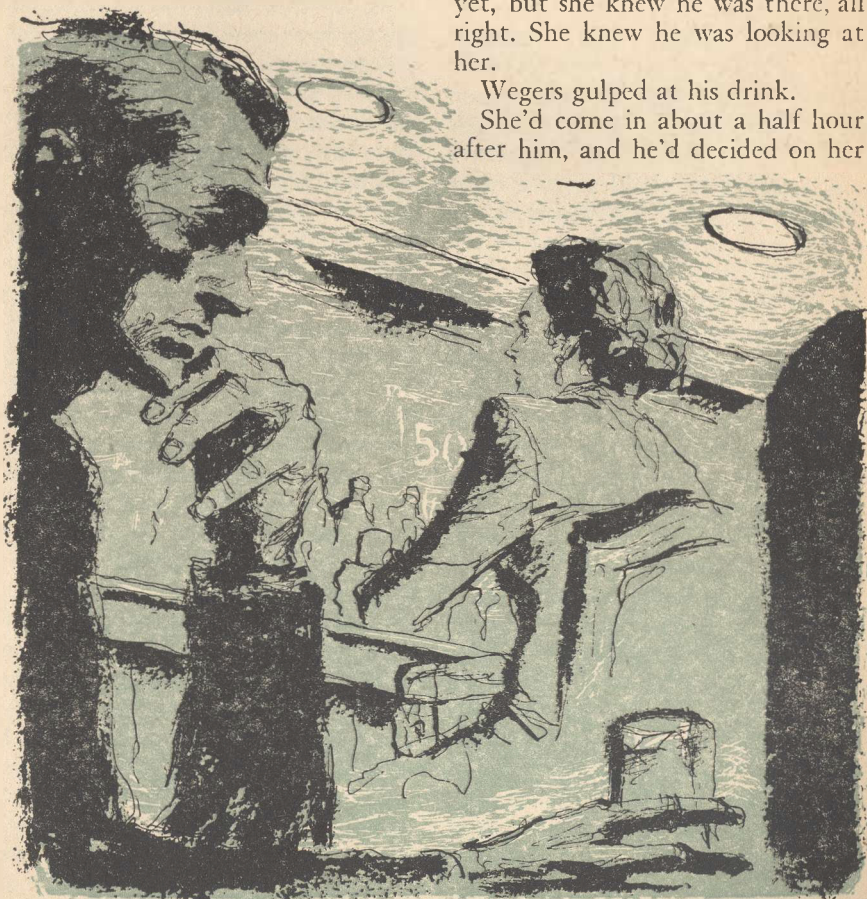
BY JOHN A. SENTRY

ARNOLD WEGERS wiped his thin hand over his lower lip, hunched forward a little in the booth, and stole another look toward the woman at the bar.

She was toying nervously with her drink, shifting around on the stool. Her eyes kept flickering toward the mirror on the back-bar. She hadn't quite looked at Wegers yet, but she knew he was there, all right. She knew he was looking at her.

Wegers gulped at his drink.

She'd come in about a half hour after him, and he'd decided on her



immediately. She was about forty, he supposed, and that was perfect. She was a little plump, but not too much — not fat, he'd told himself when he saw her. Not sloppy; soft. She had black hair, powdered with a sprinkling of silver at the temples, firm legs, and long, scarlet-tipped fingers. She was smartly dressed. There was breeding and grooming there, and money.

Wegers shifted his feet tensely. The money didn't matter — it wasn't money that interested him. It was what it had bought for the woman; the sheer, soft, expensive underthings he could picture quite clearly; the subtle Parisian perfume.

His nostrils twitched, and he finished his drink. The woman fumbled in her bag for a cigarette case, took out a cigarette with shaky fingers, and lit it with a silver lighter that trembled in her hand. Her eyes darted uncontrollably toward the mirror and locked on his, widening. Then her shoulders jerked as she violently tore her glance away. Her hands dropped to the stool beside her, and she pretended to be straightening the packages she'd piled on it.

Wegers smiled thinly. He'd picked the right spot. This bar was in the same district with the more exclusive shops, and the shops closed late tonight. There were always a few women who stopped by for a drink before they went home. Married, respectable women like his mother had been, past the excitement and

glamor of youth, with children, and homes in the suburbs.

Wegers ordered another drink with a quick gesture of his hand. He wondered what kind of a mother the woman was.

She was nervous. She knew he'd had his eyes on her from the moment she came into the bar.

He nodded to the waiter and took his new drink, smiling again. He knew women. He knew what she was feeling.

She was attractive — probably, she'd once been even more attractive, to young men who liked young women. She couldn't help but be used to being looked at. And she was just a little bit flattered now. Under all the nervousness and embarrassment, there was no doubt that some part of her was flattered.

He knew what she was thinking, too. Wegers broadened his smile. An experienced man knew what a woman was thinking, all the time. Women were uncomplicated animals.

She was thinking she could tell her husband about it tonight — tell her husband about the distinguished-looking man who'd been fascinated by her. Then it would be all right — she'd be home, and she'd be free to remember only the thrill she'd felt, and not the nervousness. She'd tease her husband with it — hoping he'd be a little jealous. Hoping he'd pay a little more attention to her.

He heard her order another drink in a faltering voice. He was not at

all anxious while she spoke to the bartender. There was no chance at all that she'd complain about being stared at by the man in the booth.

Wegers stirred his drink gently, forcing his hand to remain steady. It was too early to let his impulses completely get the better of him.

She wouldn't complain to the bartender for one simple reason: her dignity. Suburban matrons, with husbands and children, would never dream of embarrassing themselves to that extent. And Wegers knew that he looked like a successful business executive, which he was, and not a fresh, impudent young man.

He wiped his lip again. She'd be thinking of her reputation; of what her children would think if she had somehow made a mistake and the story got out that she'd been hysterically suspicious of a completely harmless man.

He wondered again what kind of a mother she was; did she love her children, watching over them and caring for them, or did she scream at them and rake them with those scarlet nails?

He put his hand up to his cheek.

The woman was staring straight ahead into the mirror, pretending she'd forgotten about him. But she was biting her lips, and her fingers were restless around her glass. He saw that her throat was pulsing regularly, the tendons standing out with unnatural clarity. Her hat had a veil that came down over her eyes, but he could see they were

quite wide, and the shoe on her gracefully dangling foot was twitching.

He looked at her neck again, and found himself reaching into his breast pocket and pulling out his wallet. His fingertips were shaking.

This was wrong. He was letting himself go too soon. But his control was only so good and no more. It was always a little premature. It was never quite as slow, controlled, and enjoyable as he planned.

His fingers opened the wallet, dug into the back compartment, and took out the clippings. He crouched over them in the dim light.

The clipping about the woman in Fresno.

It had been almost a week before they found her, thrown under the thick bushes behind her house. He hadn't been able to quiet her.

The clipping about the woman in Sacramento.

She'd been found by her husband, completely hysterical. Her description of Wegers had been distorted, jumbled by her shocked memory.

The woman in Los Angeles. She'd been drunk, and had no clear memory of what had happened.

Wegers licked his dry lips, conscious that he was breathing in short, shallow gasps. He wished there were more clippings, but he knew why there were not. Only a very few of them had the courage to tell anyone. Most of them would have hidden it — possibly even concealed it from their families and friends.

He looked up at the woman on the barstool and smiled. She looked as though she'd be too conscious of her pride and reputation; too ashamed to report to the police.

He realized she had seen his smile, and been shaken by it. She swallowed her drink hastily. Her glance in the mirror touched his again, and she flushed plainly, her cheeks scarlet even in the dim light and under the makeup. Then her eyes fled away from his and found the bartender. She signalled to him convulsively, shoving her glass forward.

Good. She wasn't leaving immediately. She was going to have another drink.

But it wasn't the drink she was staying for, Wegers knew. It was for the thrill, which by now was reaching a bittersweet peak of both embarrassment and flattery. There could be no doubt in her mind by now that Wegers was fascinated by her. She was almost nervous enough to leave, but not quite.

Now she could tell her husband a man had been staring at her, and have no doubt in her own mind. She could be sure of it; it would add that much more piquancy to her teasing.

Perhaps she was planning her evening. She might be seeing herself in her mind's eye, teasing her husband and rankling his jealousy to a point where . . .

Wegers wiped his hand across his mouth. He could see them clearly.

He re-read the clipping about the woman in Sacramento. She'd had a husband, too. She'd been waiting for him to come home from his night job at a factory. Wegers had known that, of course. He'd planned as carefully then as he had here tonight, picking this bar as a result of careful thinking about the likeliest place to encounter a suitable woman.

He remembered the woman in Sacramento, waiting in her bedroom, and the clipping trembled in his hand.

He swept up all the clippings and put them back in his wallet, putting the wallet back in his breast pocket. He swallowed half his drink in one quick motion, his feet unable to keep still under the table.

He looked at the woman again.

Would she have taken a bus in to town? No. He shook his head. Buses did not exist in her world. A cab, then? No — she rode in a car. She was the car type. Chauffeur-driven? He shook his head again as he looked at her. She wasn't in that class yet; she wouldn't be shopping in town at all, then — she'd patronize the ultra-smart suburban shops.

An experienced man always knew his women. She had a car of her own; a convertible, perhaps, while her husband drove the Cadillac. She had packages with her. She'd certainly have a car to put them in. The car would be in a parking lot down the street. She'd stopped in the bar on her way down to it.

And she had finished her drink and was standing up, taking money out of her purse and leaving it on the bar, closing her purse, picking up her packages.

She put the packages down and smoothed her skirt. She picked the packages up again, and suddenly looked in the mirror, her mouth opening in a little gasp as she remembered he'd have been watching her unconscious gesture. She clutched the packages and began hurrying toward the door, looking straight ahead of her, her footsteps short and nervous.

Wegers stood up, feeling his calves tremble. He swallowed deeply, dropping money beside his glass. He walked after her, keeping enough control of himself to move smoothly and easily, but conscious of a noise like far-off surf in his ears. He pushed open the street door and looked down the sidewalk.

Her heels were tapping on the shadowed cement as she walked quickly down the street, emerging clearly into a pool of streetlamp light, then shadowing again as she passed beyond it.

He followed her on softly-stepping feet, his muscles coiling and uncoiling like a cat's. She was not turning around to look. She was going to her car, getting away from the man who'd sat and stared at her from the booth. She was going home to supper, and her husband and her children. The thrill was over, and now for a little while she'd feel com-

pletely ashamed, until she was actually in the car and driving home. Then she'd relax, and smile softly to herself as she pulled up the neat driveway beside the suburban house. She'd begin to hum a little as she unlocked the front door and put her packages down, she'd unpin her hat and leave it on the packages, and then she'd go into the parlor, smile secretly at her husband, and say; "Henry, do you know, the strangest thing happened to me today. A man was staring at me — really *staring* at me, and for the longest time!" She'd laugh secretly. "I thought I was getting too old to fascinate men."

He could hear it quite plainly.

There was the parking lot. There wasn't any attendant at this time of night. She turned into it, opening her purse to get her keys. He turned in softly behind her.

The car was not a convertible, it was a sedan. That didn't matter. She was unlocking the door as he stepped to her side.

She looked up, gasping again, her face white. The keys dropped to the ground, and she made a reflex gesture of stooping for them before she caught herself.

"Oh! It's you!" she blurted. "I thought you wouldn't."

Wegers paid no attention to what she was saying. He stood looking silently down at her, feeling his arms tremble. His mouth was open, but his throat was dry, as usual. He waited for her to panic — to try

and break away. His tongue touched his lips again, while he waited for her to show her fear — to realize the horror of what he was going to do to her, here, now, in the parking lot. To realize that when she unlocked the front door of her safe, warm home, she would not walk, but stumble; she would not be smiling, but sobbing with shock — to understand that her marriage and her motherhood were not bulwarks that protected her from the prowling world.

He put up his hand to close her mouth as soon as she whimpered and began to scream.

She began talking in a soft, shy, blurry voice. He was so surprised he forgot to put his hand over her mouth. He realized that she was very drunk.

"I —" she gave a soft laugh. "I was going home." She reached out and touched his hand with her fingertips. "I gave up." Her eyes were downcast, and even in the darkness, he saw her blush. "I've — I've never been . . . picked up . . . before. Do you want us to go in my car?"

He stared at her, incredulous. She misunderstood his silence.

"Don't be nervous. It's all right — I — my husband and I have been separated for a long time." She dropped her voice and looked down, but he saw her lips swell. "A very long time . . ." She looked up, bolder now that she'd put it into words. "Where would you like to

take me? Would you like to come to my house? There isn't anybody — no servants — and the neighbors are away."

He still hadn't said anything. That must have begun to puzzle her. And something else must have occurred to her, and jarred her pride. Her voice became a little annoyed. "Why didn't you talk to me in the bar? Were you ashamed? Couldn't you decide whether I was good enough for you?"

An expression of complete disgust shuddered across his face when she turned up her mouth and her alcoholic breath hit him.

"You *slut!*" he whispered hoarsely. "You *slut!*"

She stepped back as if he'd hit her, her face changing. "*What?*"

His mouth twisted with sick disappointment. "Slut!" he repeated viciously. "Bitch!" She wasn't what he'd thought at all. There was no satisfaction from her. Not the sharp triumph of watching and hearing her as he destroyed the motherly, safe, respectable air of her. There was nothing to destroy. "*Harlot!*"

She smashed her hand across his face. "Don't you talk to *me* like that!" she screamed. "Don't you dare!" She tried to reach him again, and he caught her wrist just before her clawed fingernails got to his eyes. She cursed him viciously and twisted loose.

He felt as though he might throw up. She shouldn't be like this. She shouldn't talk to men like that.

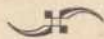
She screamed at him again, calling him dirty names. Now he heard footsteps running down the sidewalk toward the parking lot. He spun away, dodging through the shadows of parked cars, but the woman was screaming more loudly than ever.

"There he is, Officer! Over there!" He threw a desperate look over his shoulder and saw her standing in a half-crouch, the packages at her

feet, her mouth distorted. And now she screamed with her mouth wide open, her voice cracking with rage, "*Rape! Help, help, rape!*"

"No . . .!" he whispered under his breath. "I — I hadn't yet . . ."

But the beat patrolman had caught him in the beam of his flashlight and was coming forward, and Wegers knew they'd never take his word over the woman's, no matter how innocent he was.



What's Your Verdict?

No. 16 — The Whole Truth

BY SAM ROSS

WHEN Sergeant Fredericks, after a long wait, finally arrested Sam Graves, there wasn't any doubt in his mind that Sam had actually committed murder. In spite of the fact that Sam was one of the most respected citizens in town, Sergeant Fredericks was certain that Sam's wife had died, not from heart failure, but from an overdose of Luminol. In his years on the force, Fredericks had learned to depend on his own hunches as much as on logical, visible proof.

He didn't have much proof when he arrested Sam Graves, but he assumed that Sam had made some slip — some slip which he could find, given time and a free hand. The county was glad to give Fredericks a free hand — he'd proven himself over and over in just such circumstances, and police officials had learned to trust Fredericks' hunches where there wasn't a shadow of evidence.

It was easy enough to pin the motive on Sam Graves. His wife's life had been insured for fifty thousand dollars. Sam was the beneficiary. Sam had recently run into some large business debts. He needed

that fifty thousand. Badly enough, Fredericks thought, to kill for it.

Opportunity? That was going to be a little tougher. But Fredericks had greedy little Sam Graves without an alibi for the night of the murder. Sam claimed he'd taken a walk through the local park and hadn't met a soul. It was possible. Fredericks believed that Sam had stayed home instead, taking care of his own little domestic murder.

Means: there was no problem whatever about means. Sam's business was a chemical concern. He'd have had easy access to all the Luminol anyone would need.

Thus, while Fredericks didn't have anything solid to use as proof, there wasn't a thing Sam Graves could claim in his own defense except the unsupported evidence that he'd been walking when the death occurred. And, of course, the fact that Mrs. Graves had died, according to a local doctor, of heart failure.

Fredericks decided to take care of that at once. He ordered an exhumation and autopsy on Mrs. Graves. That was where he got his first surprise — an obvious one.

He should have known, of course, that after a certain time Luminol is absolutely undetectable in the human body. But he'd never run up against a case of Luminol poisoning before, and when the toxicologists turned up negative results Fredericks began to worry.

"Put him on the stand anyway," Fredericks told the Prosecuting Attorney. "He'll crack."

"And if he's judged not guilty he can never be tried again."

After some argument they put the case on the stand. And Sam Graves didn't crack. In ten minutes, the jury returned a verdict of Not Guilty.

Sergeant Fredericks didn't give up. "If I can uncover new evidence," he told the prosecutor, "we can put the guy back on trial. New evidence that proves he committed the crime."

And sure enough, new evidence was uncovered. The town drunk, Asa Wright, reported having seen Sam through a front window; Sam had been inside the house during the time of his wife's death. Sam had no alibi.

"Why didn't you tell me before?" Fredericks demanded.

"Didn't just think of it," Asa said slowly. "Can't expect a man to remember everything."

Fredericks, cursing the man's alcohol-sodden brain, went back to work. When confronted with the

evidence, Sam said: "Okay, so I lied. I was scared. That doesn't mean I killed her."

"It does to me," Fredericks said.

They took it to a judge. And the judge informed Fredericks that he was going off half-cocked again; that there were many explanations for Sam's lie, and that the new evidence didn't warrant reopening the case.

"I'll get you for perjury, then," Fredericks stormed.

"It'd mean a jail term," Sam said. "I'm scared stiff. Don't you know that the case is closed? I was tried and acquitted. I didn't commit the crime. How can you get me for perjury?"

"You lied on the stand."

"Sure. But I'm an innocent man. I'm free. You can't slap perjury on me now."

Who was right?

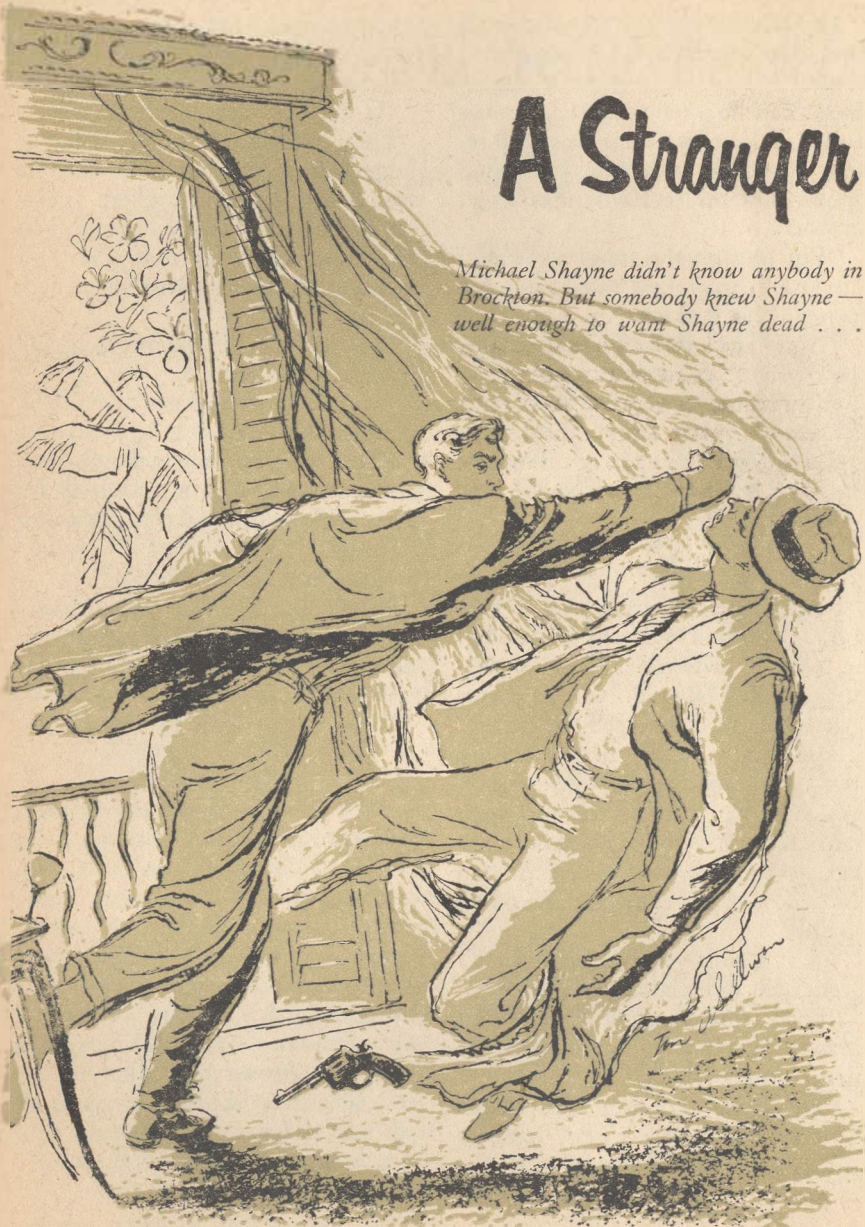
What's *your* verdict?

ANSWER:

Fredericks was right. Even if a man has been acquitted, he can still be tried for perjury on the basis of anything he said during the trial. Sam was tried on that basis and given three years in jail. The solitary atmosphere of the prison finally reached him, and, after two of his three years, he broke down and confessed to the murder of his wife. Fredericks was vindicated, but only after a lecture from his superiors on the value of evidence.

A Stranger

Michael Shayne didn't know anybody in Brockton. But somebody knew Shayne — well enough to want Shayne dead . . .



in Town

A Michael Shayne Novel

BY BRETT HALLIDAY

MICHAEL SHAYNE's first impression of the girl was her breath-taking loveliness. Not more than twenty, he thought, she would be outstandingly beautiful anywhere. But right now it caused a catch in his throat to look at her standing there hesitantly just inside the door of the drab bar-room.

It was a dirty, ill-lighted bar at which he sat alone in the middle booth with an almost-full four-ounce glass of cognac in front of him. A neighborhood sort of workingman's bar which he had entered by the merest chance because there was parking room in front and it was dusk and he was wearied with a long day on the road and the prospect of three more hours of steady driving before he could hope to reach Miami.

There were two shirt-sleeved men on bar stools drinking beer and discussing baseball statistics with the fat bartender. Two of the five booths along the wall were occupied. Two elderly men wearing leather jackets

were in the first booth talking earnestly with a too-nattily-dressed, too-pallid-faced young man whom Shayne had put down at first glance on entering as a bookie or numbers runner.

The second booth was unoccupied, and a man sat alone in the rear booth, facing the door. He had a tall highball glass in front of him that was half-full of amber liquid in which the ice-cubes were melted. The way his eyes jerked up hopefully when Shayne entered the door and then dropped again listlessly to his glass told the detective that he was waiting for someone to join him, that he had been waiting for some time and was beginning to be apprehensive that the someone wasn't coming after all. He had mild features and was middle-aged and bald. He wore a dark blue suit and black bow tie.

There were cigarette butts strewn on the floor of the room, and a pervading odor of stale smoke, spilled beer and human sweat in the thick atmosphere. Shayne had ordered his drink, ignoring the momentary glances of the others.

He would be ignored now. He had been classified and pigeon-holed as a queer, but one who need not impinge on the little close-knit community of ordinary fellows with normal drinking appetites.

Michael Shayne's second impression of the girl was that she was frightened. *Terrified* was a better word for it. It showed in the quiver-

ing rigidity of her stance just inside the doorway, in the compressed lips that told of tightly-set teeth behind them, in the hands that were clasped into white-knuckled fists at her sides, in the wide blue eyes that surveyed the interior of the bar-room with stark fear.

From where he sat, Shayne could not see the reactions of the occupants of the booths to the girl. There was immediate silence as the door closed behind her, and the two men on stools turned to stare. The bartender's mouth sagged open in ludicrous astonishment.

The girl's wary, fearful gaze slid swiftly over the trio at the bar and focussed on the first booth. It remained fixed there for the space of ten seconds and then moved down to rest on the angular face of the red-headed detective from Miami.

Michael Shayne's third impression of the girl was that she recognized him, that she had expected to find him sitting there, that he was the reason she had entered the bar.

It was preposterous, of course. No male in his right mind would be able ever to forget a girl like that if he had ever seen her before.

And Shayne had never been in Brockton before. He was not, so far as he was aware, even casually acquainted with a single one of the 40,296 inhabitants which a huge sign on the outskirts had told him was the population of the city.

More than that: no one could possibly have expected to find him

seated in this particular bar at this particular time. No one, again so far as he was aware, could have guessed that he even planned to choose a route that would take him through Brockton on his long drive from Mobile to Miami. And he hadn't known he was going to select this bar for his patronage until the moment he saw the sign outside and the convenient parking space in front that lured him to stop.

So his third impression was more than preposterous. It was impossible. The girl could not recognize him. She could not have entered the bar looking for him. She could not be moving toward him fearfully, lips trembling as she sought to loosen jaw muscles so she could talk to him.

But she was doing just that.

She was younger than he'd imagined, Shayne thought as she neared him through the murky atmosphere. Her body was slender and graceful, and she held her head erect, chin uplifted, with a sort of regal grace.

She wore a deceptively simple dress of creamy silk, hand-embroidered in jade-green at throat, waist and hem in a bold pattern that looked Mexican to Shayne. She had golden hair that was cut short and clung to her head in tiny soft ringlets that gave an illusion of height above her five feet three or four.

Shayne sat quietly, both big hands cupping the glass in front of him, his eyes locked with hers as she drew near. There was more than sheer

terror in her unblinking eyes. They questioned him, and they implored him to understand, and they begged piteously for forgiveness. For what — Shayne did not know.

Shayne was not aware of two men who had followed her in. He waited, staring back into her fear-dilated eyes, seeing the lips tremble uncontrollably, then part enough to allow three words to be wrenched from her throat:

"I'm sorry. I"

She got no further.

The two men had strode forward, and one of them shouldered her roughly aside, thrusting her back against the wall and moving slightly behind Shayne as he did so.

He was a big man, with hulking shoulders and with hands the size of picnic hams. He had a moon-like face, with a small mouth beneath a wide, flattened nose. His eyes were small and inflamed as they glared down at the detective.

His companion was tall and slender and wore a conservative, pin-stripe business suit, and a very natty snap-brim hat tilted low over searching black eyes. He was in his mid-thirties, with high cheekbones and a cleanly sculptured jaw. He stood very calmly in front of Shayne, expressionless as he carefully studied the seated detective.

Smoke curled up lazily from a cigarette in his left hand. His right hand was thrust deep in the side coat pocket that clearly showed the outline of a stubby automatic.

Shayne made no movement. Both hands were in front of him on the table. He glanced swiftly at the bigger man, and then gave his entire attention to the other.

He said, "I think there's some mistake."

"No mistake," the tall man said. His voice was pleasant and supremely self-confident. "Want to talk to you. Outside."

Shayne lifted his glass of brandy and took a deep swallow, eyes not leaving the other's face. There was the briefest nod, and a ham-like fist crashed against his right temple. The brandy glass flew against the wall, and Shayne was catapulted sidewise, his body wedged in the corner between the wooden table and the back of the booth.

From a long distance away he heard a shrilly whimpering exhalation of breath from the girl who had stopped at his booth and started to speak to him. There was no further sound in the bar-room.

Shayne set his teeth together hard and slowly pushed himself erect. The tall slender man had not moved. His black eyes continued to study the rugged features of the red-headed detective with the same impersonal interest as before.

He said, "Outside," and took a single backward step, right hand still bunched in his coat pocket.

Shayne put his hands on the table in front of him and pushed his wide-shouldered body erect.

Then, with knees slightly bent

and leaning forward from the waist for balance, he awkwardly sidled out of the booth.

As he straightened to his full height in the aisle, his left foot shot out behind him in a vicious kick aimed at the big man's groin, and at the same instant he dived headlong at the slender man with the gun.

The sole of his shoe struck solid flesh behind him and gave his body impetus that threw him into the other man before he could side-step. They crashed to the floor together and Shayne had his big hand over the pocketed automatic before it was fired.

But he had missed the vital target behind him, for while he and the gunman were still rolling on the floor under the first impact of his dive, the toe of a number twelve shoe caught him squarely on the side of the neck just below the cheekbone.

For one brief instant everything blacked-out. It was purely by instinct that the grip of his hand on the automatic did not weaken and that his other hand found the throat of the writhing figure beneath him.

Then the big man undid what he had done before by kicking him viciously again. This time the toe of his shoe landed in Shayne's ribs as he was rolling on the floor on top of the gunman, and the impact brought him back to sharp awareness.

He was wedged half under a booth, but the automatic came free in his hand and he whirled onto his

back and fired upward once at blurred hulk of the second man stepping in for the kill.

He knew he had missed as he pulled the trigger, but the big man halted momentarily and Shayne dragged himself to his knees with the gun ready, blinking his eyes desperately to sweep the red mist of pain away, and he was barely conscious of swift movement toward him from the front of the bar. He didn't see a third man coming to aid the first two, or the short length of lead pipe that clunked solidly against the side of his head.

2.

When he came to, he realized he was huddled half on the floor and half on the back seat of a moving car. There was someone on the seat beside him, and he heard a voice speaking from in front. It was the cold, incisive voice he had heard in the bar: "Put it back in his pocket, Mule. And don't try to slip even a buck out of it. This has got to be a straight hit-run accident and no fooling about it."

There was a low rumble of disgust and Shayne felt a big hand feeling over his body for his hip pocket and slipping something into it. His wallet, he supposed from what he had just overheard.

They had made some sort of mistake, of course. The girl and the two men who had evidently followed her into the bar. And they

hadn't wanted to argue the matter back in the bar. They hadn't been at all interested in any explanation.

The voice came from the front seat again.

"Still passed out, Mule?"

Close beside him, a hoarse rumble responded disgustedly, "Cold like a mackerel. Hell, I didn't kick him hard as all that . . ."

"Just so he doesn't die on us for another half-mile," the pleasant voice cautioned. "Sure he's still breathing?"

"Yeh. Sure. He's okay."

Neither of them said anything else. The car moved forward smoothly at moderate speed. Another half-mile! Shayne had very little idea how long he had been unconscious — how long they had been driving. They were out of the city, he knew. There was country silence around them. They met an occasional car speeding in the opposite direction.

So it was all right if he just stayed alive for another half-mile! After that it wouldn't matter.

Why not?

Because he was slated to get it then in any event, of course. Whether he had returned to consciousness or not.

There was something particularly cold-blooded about that inference.

He was quite sure, now, that he didn't wish to discuss the matter of a possible mistake in identity with this pair in the car. His instinct told him that the faintest show of returning consciousness would earn

him nothing more than another sledge-hammer blow from one of Mule's big fists.

And that he simply couldn't take, under the circumstances. Crammed down on the floor as he was with only his chest and shoulders resting on the cushion, he was in no condition at all to argue with the man called Mule.

The brakes went on evenly, and the driver's pleasant voice announced, "This looks just about right. A nice long straight stretch where we can see a car coming from either way."

The car came to a smooth stop. The door opened on the side away from Shayne and Mule grunted, "You stay put, Gene. I'll handle this hunk of meat easy."

Shayne stayed limp while huge hands caught his shoulders and dragged him roughly out of the car. He made his eyes stay shut while the strong beam of a flashlight sprayed over his face.

"Good enough," said the driver approvingly. "Lucky for you you didn't put any marks on his face back there that wouldn't fit a hit-run. You remember how I told you we'd handle it?"

"Sure, Gene." Mule's voice was placating. "Long's he's out cold it'll be easy. You back off, huh, and come fast? I hold him up here beside the road like a rag-doll, see, and shove him out in front so the bumper hits him square. That'll do it fine."

As Mule spoke, he lifted Shayne's

limp body by the shoulders so his feet dangled inches above the ground. He held the detective's hundred ninety pounds of dead weight as easily as a child might really hold a rag-doll.

Shayne heard the car go into gear and start backing away. He stayed hunched down, relaxed.

He doubted that Mule would have a gun. A man like Gene was unlikely to trust him with one. Not on a mission like this. Not when they couldn't afford a bullet-wound to be found in a body slated to be the victim of a hit-run driver.

The receding lights were some distance away now. Crouched as he was at Mule's feet, Shayne's eyes were wide open and calculating.

There was silence and darkness about them. They appeared to be on a deserted stretch of two-lane country highway, and the only headlights visible in either direction were those of Gene's car as he backed away to get up good speed before he reached them again.

He had stopped now. Some three hundred yards back, Shayne judged. Immediately the lights moved forward this time. Slowly and then faster.

Mule stooped down to pick up the inert body at his feet. The on-coming headlights were bright now, rushing toward them at eighty feet per second.

Mule's big hands gripped Shayne's torso beneath the armpits.

As he came erect, Shayne put

everything into one twisting motion that jerked the hands loose and brought him face to face with the big man.

This time his knee found the groin unerringly and Mule gasped and pitched forward off balance into the path of the speeding car.

Brakes screamed as Gene's headlights lighted the roadside struggle, but it was too late.

The heavy car slewed violently, but Shayne's shove sent the big man directly in front of the bumper and there was a sickening, high-pitched scream of animal terror that was cut off abruptly by a bone-crushing thud of hurtling steel smashing into two hundred pounds of flesh and bone.

Shayne whirled away, leaped into the shallow ditch, clambered up the opposite bank and through a barbed wire fence into an open field without looking back.

He ran swiftly and easily in the faint starlight, taking a course diagonally away from the road and back in the direction from which the car had come.

There was utter silence behind him now, but in his ears there still lingered the inhuman cry of agony as a man died in the manner Shayne had been supposed to die.

3.

Fifteen minutes later, Shayne found himself on a dirt road. His watch said eight o'clock and he

figured it had been an hour since he stopped in the bar. A faint glow on the skyline indicated that Brockton's lights lay in that direction. He headed for them, knowing he wouldn't feel comfortable until he could get to that gun in the compartment of his Hudson.

His neck muscles ached where he had been kicked but, as far as he could tell, that was the extent of the damage. Too many unanswered questions didn't help his terrific headache.

Who was the girl who had fingered him? And who were the three men, one of whom he hadn't even seen?

Mule he dismissed rapidly, as a muscle man who, he knew, wouldn't be bothering anybody again. A cold sense of anger and outrage filled him as he considered Gene.

Inevitably, his thoughts returned to the girl. She was a beauty, all right, with every external sign of character and breeding. Yet she deliberately fingered him for these butchers. She had *known* what she was doing. Why . . . ?

He wasn't on a case. He'd just completed a week's vacation with friends in Mobile. He'd made plenty of enemies in the last ten or fifteen years but that was in the past. And anyone who had a killing grudge against him could have had better opportunities to bump him in Miami than in tonight's crazy set-up.

One possibility occurred to him. Could be something had come up in Miami. Something so important that

someone had gone to a hell of a lot of trouble to stop him before he learned of it. A telephone to Lucy would settle that.

Shayne was lucky enough to flag down a cab just outside the city. The helpful cabbie pocketed a ten dollar bill for his pains in locating the bar and Shayne breathed a sigh of relief as he opened the Hudson and got his .45 automatic.

He tried to repress a wry grin at the sight of a big square summons under the wiper.

Cops! he thought disgustedly. Right around on the dot to check up on overtime parkers, but let a man get slugged in a public place and dragged out on a murder ride, and where in hell are they?

He walked into the bar he didn't remember leaving more than a half hour ago.

A half hour later, the red-headed detective was back in the car growling angrily at the parking ticket. The session in the bar had been practically meaningless — nothing. The fat bartender, at first belligerent, softened quickly at the sight of the gun butt bulging out of Shayne's pocket. He flatly denied knowing anything about the girl or the three men. Yes, he had called the cops, ten minutes later, but they hadn't answered the call. Busy handing out parking tickets, Shayne thought bitterly.

Of the twenty or so customers now filling the joint, Shayne had recognized only three who'd been

there when it had happened. He asked the shirt-sleeved man who'd been at the bar to join him with the others.

The two elderly men in leather jackets were still in the first booth. All of them looked embarrassed when Shayne sat down to question them. They didn't know the men and they hadn't dared interfere. The girl, they admitted was a beauty. Her kind didn't come into bars. No, they'd never seen her before. She had run out, when the third guy had come into sock him with the pipe. Yes, the bartender had called the cops, but they hadn't come as yet.

They all seemed scared and a little reluctant to talk, Shayne thought. He'd asked them for the best hotel in town, pushed a twenty-dollar bill toward each of them, asked them to call him at the Manor Hotel if they remembered anything further and walked out to the car.

He was still scowling at the parking ticket, wondering what sort of police force this town had. Cops so busy ticketing a parked car that they hadn't time to investigate assault and attempted murder inside the bar.

It was then that two things happened quickly. First, the shirt-sleeved man sneaked out of the shadows to tell him that he thought he'd seen a picture of the girl in the Brockton paper a few days ago.

The rabbit-looking guy went on to say that he'd been afraid to an-

swer in front of the others when the second thing happened.

A car came up from behind them, past Shayne's car, then rolled in smoothly in front of him, blocking him. It had a tall radio antennae and the letters P.D. above the rear license plate.

The rabbit man breathed swiftly, "Jeez, the cops! I don't want to. . . ." He hurried away on the sidewalk in the opposite direction as the right-hand door of the police cruiser opened and a smartly uniformed figure stepped out briskly.

Shayne set his teeth together hard as the policeman swaggered up.

Instinctively, he rammed the .45 down behind the seat cushion.

His private detective's license permitted him to carry it, but with these small-town cops you never knew. Particularly in a town like Brockton where an armed assault complaint went unanswered for hours.

The policeman was young but aggressively hard-jawed. He leaned his elbow on the door beside Shayne and said, "Stranger in town, huh?"

"Driving through."

"Didn't you see that ticket on your windshield?"

"Just noticed it."

"H-m-m. Got your motor running and all. Planning on slipping away without stopping by the station to settle it up?"

Shayne said, "No."

"Wouldn't like for you to do that. Been parked here in front of this

bar a long time, haven't you?"

"You should know." Despite himself, Shayne's irritation leaked out.

"Been drinking?"

"Is that any of your business? Okay, so I over-parked. If you'll get your wagon out of the way I'll pull around to the station and settle the ticket."

"Maybe it is some of my business." The young cop's eyes narrowed importantly. "From that whiff I got I'd say that's quite a load you're carrying." His voice changed abruptly to curt command. "Cut off your motor and step out here. You're not driving anywhere till I decide whether you're sober enough."

That did it. Despite all his past experience with arrogant cops, small-town or big-town — despite the fact that all he wanted was to get to a hotel where there was food and drink and a telephone and a soft bed to relax on, Shayne lost control.

All the bottled-up anger of the last two hours came out snarling, "Out of my way, punk. I've had one damned drink if that's what . . ."

The door came open and an officious hand grabbed his shoulder hard. Shayne chopped the edge of his palm down on the policeman's forearm muscles. The hand fell away.

"Keep your goddamned hands off me." Shayne's voice was throaty and rough.

The young policeman was well-trained. He stood back, rubbing his forearm, and called his partner.

Shayne knew this was no good.

Never argue with a strange cop. Who knew that axiom better than he? Sanity reasserted itself.

He stepped out from behind the wheel as the other patrolman approached and said thickly, "Sorry, Officer. I really didn't mean . . . His neck ached and he swayed slightly and put his hand on the open door to steady himself.

The second cop was burly and red-faced and older. He shoved past the first one and said happily, "Drunk and resisting arrest, huh? Come along with me now." He caught Shayne's left wrist in both big hands and moved in behind the detective swiftly but inexpertly to thrust the arm up behind him in a hammer-lock.

Every man is constituted to endure so much before the breaking point is reached. Shayne had endured enough in Brockton that night. Sanity departed.

He reeled out of the hammerlock and drove his right fist into the bulbous red face beside him. As the burly cop staggered back, the younger man stepped in calmly and slapped Shayne behind the ear with his blackjack.

For the second time in Brockton that evening, Shayne went out like a candle in a hurricane.

4.

When Shayne awoke early the next morning he found himself in a small iron-barred cell in the local

jail. He grudgingly admitted to himself that it was his own fault that he wasn't luxuriating in a soft bed in the Manor Hotel, instead of this coop. Couldn't blame the cops. Sure they'd been tough and officious, but most cops get that way after dealing with drunks and criminals night after night.

The pair who had picked him up couldn't have known what had happened to him earlier in the bar last night. Nor could they realize that he was already boiling inside when they approached him on the ticket.

So all right. So the thing now was to get out of jail. He'd play it weak and submissive, get out and try to find out what this was all about. There was one consolation — at least he wasn't in a morgue, the supposed victim of a hit-run driver.

He ate a breakfast of boiled grits, a tough slice of ham, and muddy coffee brought to him by a sad-faced turnkey. From the guard he learned the names of the arresting officers and the judge. He played it friendly to give the man the impression that the local boys had really taught him — a big city shamus — a lesson of respect. He was really going to play the repentant sinner. Then he relaxed, waiting for his hearing.

At nine o'clock, he followed the turnkey into a small room at the rear of the police headquarters and appeared before the city judge. Standing stiffly at attention were the two cops who had taken him in.

The judge was a sallow-faced,

balding man who was sucking carefully on a long black cigar as Shayne was ushered in. The turnkey spoke Shayne's name and withdrew.

The detective glanced anxiously at the two officers as he entered. The younger one, Burke, he assumed, was standing stiffly with folded arms, glaring at Shayne.

His red-faced companion was not quite so obviously at attention. He had a bulbous nose and a ruddy face and Shayne was happy to detect the trace of a human twinkle in his eyes. There was a slight swelling on his upper lip which Shayne supposed had resulted from contact with his fist the night before, and he played it by ear by nodding solemnly to the judge and then turning impulsively aside to Officer Grimes and saying:

"I *must* have been crocked last night, Sergeant. Buy you a drink to make up for it if I get out of here with the price of one."

Grimes grinned momentarily, and Shayne solemnly turned to listen to the charges.

"Over-time parking. . . . Drunk and disorderly on a public street. . . . Resisting arrest. . . . How say you, Michael Shayne?"

Shayne looked at the judge and said, "I plead guilty, your Honor."

Judge Grayson judicially folded his hands. "Any extenuating circumstances?"

Shayne didn't hesitate. He said humbly, "I'm afraid I had one too many, your Honor."

"I see. I understand you are a licensed private detective in this State."

"Yes, your Honor."

"Is it your habitual custom to drive while under the influence?"

"No, sir."

"Yet you were attempting to do so last night when Officer Burke intercepted you."

Michael Shayne drew in a deep breath and looked at the judge. "I will always be thankful that he did, your Honor. I congratulate Brockton on its diligent and alert police officers."

"Very well." The judge's voice was peremptory, but Shayne felt he had scored. "Brockton is a community of children and of homes. We are a friendly community, but we do love our children. Ninety-five dollars and costs." He looked past Shayne, "Next case."

Grimes and Burke disappeared while Shayne paid up and got his wallet and other possessions back from another uniformed man.

It was almost ten o'clock before he sat in his car again, parked in the rear of the police station, and was free to drive away, to put the smell of Brockton and its efficient police force behind him.

Later, comfortably situated in a suite on the fourth floor, with a six-ounce glass of his favorite brandy, he gave the hotel operator his Miami number and waited to hear Lucy's lilting voice over the wire.

But Lucy's voice sounded un-

lilting and strained when it finally came over the wire: "Michael Shayne. Private investigations."

He said, "You sound queer, angel. What's wrong?"

He heard her swiftly indrawn breath. Then, "I'm not just sure about that, Mr. Johnson. Will you hold on please while I go into Mr. Shayne's private office and see if I can find the memo?"

Shayne said, "Sure," and sweated out the thirty seconds until he heard Lucy's cautiously lowered voice again:

"Michael! Where are you? I waited up late at my place with a bottle of cognac expecting you back last night and. . . ."

"What's all the hush-hush about?" he interrupted harshly.

"There's a man in the outer office, Michael. He was waiting out front when I came in this morning. He . . . gives me the creeps. Won't give any name or say what he wants, except to see you. I told him I expected you back any moment, and he just settled down there. Smoking cigarettes and watching every move I make . . ."

"Describe him," Shayne interrupted.

"Honestly, Michael, like he's modeled himself after one of those TV program gunmen. And Michael . . . I'm sure he does have a gun. I'm positive I saw a bulge inside his coat like a gun. Where are you? I'd slipped in here to warn you so you wouldn't walk in unawares."

"I'm in a town called Brockton, Lucy. In the middle of the state." Michael Shayne's tone was peremptory. "I may be stuck here for a day or so . . . so listen to me carefully."

"Brockton. What on earth . . . ?"

"It's a long story, angel. I stopped at a bar here on my way home last night for a drink and there was this girl. She came into the bar and . . . well, hell, Lucy, it's too long a story and too crazy for you to understand."

"But you did spend the night in Brockton on account of her?" Lucy Hamilton's voice was suddenly icy.

Shayne grinned. "That's right, honey-chile," he drawled. "I sure did. All on account of her. And I'm sticking around for a while hoping to get another look at her." His voice became crisp. "Tell me this fast. Anything come up there at the office after I phoned you yesterday morning? Any new clients? Anyone whom you told I was driving back from Mobile who might have made a guess at my itinerary?"

"No. There's been nothing at all. Until this man who showed up this morning. Is it trouble, Michael? Are you mixed up in . . . something?"

"I'm plenty mixed up," Shayne told her grimly. "Write this down. The Manor Hotel in Brockton. Number four-ten. And, angel . . . that goon in the front office may be part of it."

"Part of what?" wailed Lucy.

"That's what I'd like to know. As soon as I hang up, call Will

Gentry. Tell him I'm out of town and you've got a suspicious character there. Have him send some men to pick the guy up and go over him. Find out who he is and why. Distract him until Will's boys get there."

"All right, Michael. Please . . . be careful."

"In Brockton," said Shayne, "it doesn't seem to help much. Call Gentry now. Good-bye."

5.

At the Brockton *Daily Courier*, Shayne went to work on the one faint clue he had to work on, the shirt-sleeved guy's tip on the newspaper photo.

Her picture leaped up at him from the front page of the preceding Friday's issue. Heavy black letters over the photo asked: *Who Is She?* The caption beneath was: *Amnesia victim in local hospital.*

Shayne's eyes picked out the details of the local reporter's story.

"About two A.M. this girl walked into City Hospital in a state of shock. Sobbing and incoherent, she was unable to identify herself or to account for anything in her past, prior to the time she had found herself wandering on the highway near Brockton.

"She said a passing motorist had picked her up, and driven her to the hospital entrance and driven off without giving his name. He had been driving a shabby coupe, either dark green or blue. She

wasn't sure of the make.

"She couldn't describe him, but he had been kind to her, she said, and she was grateful.

"Dr. Jay Philbrick, who had examined her, disclosed that she had suffered a hard blow on the right temple from some blunt instrument an hour or so previously which could account for her amnesia.

"He said that she might recover after the initial shock passed, but that it was not unusual for even weeks or months to pass before a patient recovered his memory.

"Dr. Philbrick also stated it was important that she be identified as soon as possible because the best treatment for a case of her type was to place her in contact with familiar faces and surroundings. Such conditions would jolt her memory into focus again. Therefore, the *Courier* asks you for any information that may lead to her identification."

A detailed description checked with Shayne's recollection of her in the bar:

"Age: about 20. Height: five feet four inches: Weight: 115 pounds. Fair complexion; blue eyes; curly golden hair; no marks or scars. Wearing an expensive white silk dress, bronze evening pumps, and a gold wrist watch."

There was also an appeal to the motorist who had picked her up to tell the authorities where and under

what conditions he found her since the police theorized that she might have been the victim of an auto accident. Dr. Philbrick conceded that the blow could have resulted from such a cause.

Shayne frowned as he laid aside the paper. Did this explain the crazy set-up? If she were still an amnesia victim, she might have thought she recognized him from out of the past. But would the hospital release her until she was fully recovered?

He turned to the next day's paper and found the answer. No picture this time, but a headline: *Amnesia Victim Identified*. The story went on to say that:

"Mr. Amos Buttrell, wealthy New York socialite, wintering at the Roney Plaza in Miami Beach, appeared here today to claim his daughter, Amy, after recognizing her photograph which appeared in this paper yesterday. At the reunion in the hospital, the happy parent said that his daughter had left the hotel two days ago to visit friends in St. Petersburg. He had called them the following morning because she hadn't phoned him. When the friends told him that she hadn't arrived, he hadn't been too fearful because he knew she was a competent driver and she had enough money to take care of any emergency. He had been completely bowled over to see her picture in the *Courier*. He also wondered how she came to be near Brockton, which was not

the best possible route she should have taken to St. Petersburg. He identified her car as a 1954 Pontiac convertible. Chief Ollie Hanger has requested State wide cooperation in a hunt for the missing car in addition to information about the girl since her disappearance."

There was some additional sob stuff describing the meeting between the father and the daughter who could not recognize him, with some reassuring words by Dr. Philbrick to the effect that she would certainly recover as a result of this speedy reunion.

Shayne folded the paper thoughtfully and then gathered all the issues to take back to the hotel where he could study them for further developments of the girl's story.

In his hotel room, he put in a long distance call to the Roney Plaza to Mr. Amos Buttrell. It took the hotel manager, himself, to convince Shayne, that no such person had ever registered at his hotel.

He quickly checked the *Courier* story. Either the paper was wrong or Mr. Buttrell had lied for reasons best known to himself.

What in hell did it all add up to? A beautiful victim of amnesia, supposedly the daughter of a wealthy New Yorker, walking into the bar last night and fingering him for a trio of murderers!

Yet she had never seen him before in his life. At least, *he* had never seen her. Could that be a quirk of

an amnesic, he wondered? If they couldn't remember things back beyond a certain point, were they likely to have hallucinations and *think* they remembered someone?

But what was the girl doing in Brockton last night when she supposedly had been taken away by her father the preceding Saturday? Had she regained her memory in the meantime and come back to Brockton to identify the man or men who had attacked her in the first place? That was, supposing she had been attacked on the highway and a simple automobile accident weren't the reason for her appearance at the hospital in the condition she had been in.

Nothing made sense any way you looked at it. Shayne needed a lot more answers. He looked up the number of the *Courier*, called it and got the City Desk.

He asked for Hy Brown, the reporter who had covered the story, and got him. He evaded the eager questions concerning his scrap with the two police, noting the reporter's comment that Burke was an over-anxious beaver but that Grimes wasn't a bad guy. No, he, Shayne, wasn't sore about it, but he was curious about the girl's story.

The reporter talked freely. Nothing new had developed about the girl. The car still hadn't been found and, as far as he knew, the girl was back in Miami with her father. Sure, he had gotten the name right. He had interviewed him personally.

Amos Buttrell. Although it was funny that Buttrell had promised to call him to let him know about any future developments, and hadn't.

Shayne thanked him, hung up, went to his room and put in a person-to-person call to Timothy Rourke at the *Miami Daily News*.

The connection was made promptly and, as soon as Shayne identified himself, Rourke asked curiously, "Know anything about the thing with Lucy at your office this morning, Mike?"

"What thing?"

"One of the boys just got it from headquarters. Some hoodlum the police pulled in on Lucy's complaint, seems like. I haven't had a chance to check with her."

"Do that right away, Tim. And then get Will Gentry and find out everything you can about the man. Particularly, if there's anything at all to tie him up with Brockton or anybody in Brockton."

"Brockton? You mean that town up-state?"

"That's where I'm phoning from. Know anything about it?"

"No. What are you doing there?"

"Having fun," said Shayne grimly. "Here's what I called about, Tim. Do you recall a local story the last few days about a girl amnesia victim turning up in Brockton and being identified by her father in Miami?"

"Nothing like that in the papers lately, Mike."

"The name's Buttrell," Shayne persisted. "Amos Buttrell and daugh-

ter Amy. At the Roney from New York. Ring any bells?"

"Not a tinkle."

"He was supposed to be registered at the Roney as late as last Friday. I called there but drew a blank. You check at that end to be sure there's no mistake. And see if there are any other Buttrells in town, Miami or the Beach. And if they've got a daughter named Amy who doesn't remember very well."

"Will do," said Rourke. "Where can I reach you in Brockton?"

"At the Manor Hotel." Shayne gave him the number. "Will you get onto it fast?"

"I'm on it now," Tim Rourke assured him cheerfully. "Good-bye."

Shayne hung up and skimmed through the Brockton directory. He found *Philbrick Jay Dr. 342 Orange Drive* without any additional office number, and called his home.

A briskly impersonal female voice answered his ring. He gave his name and asked to see the doctor on a personal urgent matter. She told him the doctor was busy, but she might slip him in between callers.

He hurried downstairs to ask directions for reaching Orange Drive from the doorman.

6.

As he drove along the quiet residential streets of Brockton in the afternoon sunlight, Shayne tried to reconcile the violent events of the previous night with what was ob-

viously a peaceful and pleasant community.

Yet he had a positive feeling that the three men who followed the girl in were native to Brockton, that they had been recognized by some of the people in the bar. Not that he felt the bystanders were involved in or approved of what had taken place, but that they simply accepted it.

And why hadn't the police checked that call from the bar? He made a mental note to check that later. Who was responsible for the fact that official action had not been taken?

Shayne studied it all again. Conceding that he had been recognized somehow, *why* had Gene and his two thugs tried to wipe him out? No one in Brockton, so far as he was aware, had any earthly reason to hate or fear Michael Shayne.

Had the girl made a mistake in identity when she came directly to his booth?

Shayne didn't think so. There had been no hesitancy in her manner. He distinctly recalled the look of recognition on her face, his definite impression before she ever took a step toward him that *he* was the reason she had entered the room. That she had come in looking for him and expecting to find him there.

Maybe that was an after-result of amnesia. A sort of hallucination that took the place of memory. That was one possibility he wanted to check with Dr. Philbrick. But there hadn't

been a single thing about the girl to give the impression that she was anything but completely normal. Shayne didn't know much about amnesia cases, but he had a vague idea that such a person would be outwardly different from one in full possession of her faculties. That there would be something about the look in her eyes or in her bearing that would indicate loss of memory. That was something else to ask the doctor.

Number 342 was a three-storied mansion set well back from the street. A trim maid led him into a modern reception room off the center hall. The room was empty and while he waited, Shayne examined some of the framed diplomas on the wall which made the reassuring claim that Dr. Jay Philbrick had been duly awarded the Degree of Doctor of Medicine in Southern Medical College in 1932.

The side door opened and a pert young red-headed nurse emerged.

"Yes?" she said, her eyes twinkling.

Shayne grinned disarmingly. "Just examining the doc's credentials. I'm Shayne. I phoned you a few minutes ago . . ."

"Oh yes." The twinkle vanished. "I'm sorry but I should have checked with the doctor before suggesting that you come out. He's busy and won't be able to see you now."

Shayne tried to keep his irritation from showing. "I don't mind waiting," he said in an even voice.

The nurse frowned nervously and Shayne had the distinct impression

that she had been told to get rid of him.

Just then a mellow voice came through the half opened door behind her.

"... not at all, Ed. Drop in any time you feel the ticker needs a check up. As a matter of fact, I have some time on my hands right now and if it weren't for my strict orders to you, ha-ha, I'd go out and shoot some golf with you . . ."

The voice came closer. A little sallow-faced man pushed the door open and came out, followed by a tall, solid-bodied man with a shock of white hair and a ruddy, beaming face who was still talking as he entered the room.

"... but it is doctor's orders, old man, so . . ."

His voice stopped abruptly in mid-sentence. He glanced uncertainly from Shayne to the nurse, and then back to the patient. In a more professional voice he said, "Slow down a little, Ed, and don't worry. Call me in a day or so after I've checked the results of the test."

He turned abruptly and shut the door of the reception room behind him.

Shayne moved forward in a long, unhurried stride, pushed past the protesting nurse and followed the doctor.

Dr. Philbrick stood with his back to him, leaning over the desk with a telephone to his ear. He turned to look at Shayne, and his ruddy face was no longer beaming. He replaced

the telephone slowly and faced the detective. "This is a private office, sir, and you are intruding."

Shayne said, "I think there's some mistake. I telephoned and your nurse made an appointment for me to see you. The name is Shayne."

"I judged it was," said the doctor coldly, "when I saw you in the outer office. My nurse had been instructed not to admit you."

"Why, doctor? You don't even know what I want."

"I saw this morning's *Courier*. You're a private detective from Miami who was arrested last night for common drunkenness and disorderly conduct. I can't conceive what you have to say that could possibly interest me."

Shayne grinned. "I didn't realize that little affair made the front pages. I want to ask you some questions about Miss Buttrell, doctor. I represent her father, who has asked me to investigate." He uttered the lie coolly, and sat down in an upholstered chair facing the desk.

A change of expression came over the doctor's face the moment he mentioned Miss Buttrell's name, but he could not interpret it. He could not tell whether it was fear or relief.

Dr. Philbrick hesitated, then seated himself stiffly at the desk. His ruddy face was bland again. "Miss Buttrell?" he repeated. "Why didn't you tell my nurse you were representing her father?"

Shayne shrugged. "I didn't want to spread the news around that I'm

in Brockton investigating the affair. A private detective keeps his business as private as possible."

"Ah . . . I see." The doctor's smile was frosty. "Well, Mr. Shayne, how can I help you? And how is the child, by the way? Did she respond to treatment and familiar surroundings?"

"Not too well. Not to the extent of recovering her memory. What, in your professional opinion, caused her condition?"

Dr. Philbrick frowned, drumming his fingertips. "Do you mean the precise cause of amnesia, or my opinion as to how she suffered the injury?"

"Both. You see we have absolutely nothing to go on, doctor. Her car has not been recovered. We have a gap of several hours between the time she might have passed through Brockton on her trip and the moment when she appeared at the local hospital suffering from shock and loss of memory. First, let me get this absolutely clear. Is there any possibility, doctor, that the girl was faking amnesia?"

The doctor relaxed, professionally sure of himself. "Not the slightest, Mr. Shayne. Amnesia is exceedingly difficult to fake successfully. Medical evidence in this case proved conclusively that the type of concussion she suffered would necessarily produce some amnesia. Does her own physician question my diagnosis?"

"I haven't discussed it with him," said Shayne truthfully. "I wanted

your assurance first. I understand it was a blow on the head that caused concussion. What sort of blow?"

"Do you want me to describe it in medical terms?"

"No," said Shayne hastily. "I mean . . . how was it administered? I understand you examined her immediately afterward. Do you think it was the result of an automobile accident . . . or had she been attacked?"

"Not immediately afterward, Mr. Shayne. I was called to the hospital immediately after she arrived there, but it had obviously been some hours since the injury was sustained. There were certain minor bruises on her body that might well fit the theory of an auto accident, but they were not conclusive. As to the girl having been attacked . . . there was no evidence of sexual attack if that is what you infer. The blow could easily have been administered by a blunt instrument, or it could have come from being thrown clear of a speeding car and striking her head on a smooth rock, let us say. It is difficult to say."

"She is the first amnesia victim I ever met," Shayne said frankly. "I was amazed that there were no outward signals to a layman indicating her condition. Is that normal? What I mean is," he went on hastily. "I guess I expected to find her confused and dazed. Sort of vague and dull-eyed. She showed none of that."

"Of course not." The doctor's manner was properly condescend-

ing. "This was a clear-cut case of retrograde amnesia, you must understand. The concussive shock was confined to certain nerve centers of the brain which automatically block out *past* memories. Nothing else. Her brain functions perfectly normally otherwise. Your mistake is a common one, I might add, and if she did display those symptoms it would be more than likely that she was facing loss of memory."

Shayne said slowly, "I see. One other thing, doctor. Do you consider yourself an expert on amnesia?"

Dr. Philbrick flushed and replied testily. "I consider myself competent to diagnose and treat such a case. No physician, Mr. Shayne, would consider himself an expert on amnesia. It is a relatively rare occurrence in real life, but I am thoroughly familiar with the literature on the subject."

"Good," said Shayne heartily. "Then you can tell me this. In a case like Miss Buttrell's . . . where she doesn't remember anything prior to receiving the blow on her head . . . is it possible that, in striving to remember, the patient may be subject to hallucinations? That is, *think* she remembers things that aren't true at all? Might she honestly *think* she recognizes someone whom she has never actually seen before at all?"

"This gets into the realm of the psychological rather than the physiological," protested Dr. Philbrick. "I have never seen such a case re-

ported, but it might be a possible result under certain conditions of psychological stress. I cannot venture a categorical answer, though I would say no in this particular case. During the period I had Miss Buttrell under observation I judged her to possess a quiet, sound temperament, and high intelligence. Not at all the type to work herself up into hysteria or hallucinations."

"How did she react to her father's appearance?"

"Passively. She didn't recognize him, but she seemed pleased when he announced his identity and that he had come to take her home. It was a terrible strain, you know, to be at the hospital completely unrecognized. With no knowledge of who you are . . . how you got there . . . whether you will ever be reunited with your loved ones."

"There was no question whatsoever about Mr. Buttrell's identification of her?" asked Shayne casually.

The doctor peered at him curiously. "None whatever. Her physical appearance was unaltered. She was his own daughter, whom he had seen just two days before. How could there be any possible question?"

"I guess there couldn't," sighed Shayne. "I was just thinking about the newspaper picture he identified her from. Like most photos reproduced in papers, it's quite blurred and isn't a terribly good likeness."

"That's quite true. In fact, until he arrived and saw the girl in the

flesh, Mr. Buttrell confided to me he had not been at all sure it was his daughter. I felt he was to be commended for not hesitating to make the long drive up here to relieve his parental anxiety. A less devoted father might easily have been satisfied with a telephone call which would not, of course, have proved anything since there was no physical mark on her body positively identifying her. As a matter of fact, an hour after the Buttrells left for Miami, there was a telephone call from Orlando. The man insisted it was his daughter, a Miss Henderson.

"Orlando? A girl missing from there?"

"A student at Rollins College in Winter Park. Mr. Henderson is a professor there but lives in Orlando. He was quite relieved when I convinced him it was a case of mistaken identity on his part. Now, Mr. Shayne, if you have any further questions I suggest you make them to the police, who have made a thorough investigation into the circumstances surrounding Miss Buttrell's injury." He stood up. "Please remember me to Mr. Buttrell and remind him that I am most interested in hearing the details of his daughter's ultimate recovery."

Shayne assured him that he would deliver Dr. Philbrick's message. He smiled reassuringly at the nurse as he went out.

At the hotel there was a message for Shayne to call Timothy Rourke

in Miami. The detective hurried up to his room to put the call through.

7.

From Rourke he learned that there had been no such person as Amos Buttrell at the Roney Plaza and that Will Gentry had picked up the suspicious character in Shayne's office. The guy had a gun. Other than that he was clean, clean as any sharp hood who'd been sent out on a job. He'd be held for at least sixty days for carrying a concealed weapon. The only thing on him was a clipping from the *Brockton Courier* dated last Saturday concerning the accidental highway death of an Orlando assistant State's Attorney named Randolph Harris.

Shayne didn't bother to have it read to him; he had the copy in his collection right in the apartment. He hedged on Rourke's request for a story, promising him that he'd give him an exclusive if anything did shape up. He hung up and quickly found the story. Saturday's paper was the one that carried the second story about Amy Buttrell — the identification of her by her father.

The headline read: *Accident Victim Identified*. He scanned the details carefully.

"The burned and disfigured body of Randolph Harris, 26, assistant to the State's Attorney in Orlando, was tentatively identified this morning by local police

after they traced the license number of his automobile, which was discovered late yesterday afternoon destroyed by fire at the bottom of a deep ravine just off the Miami highway, about six miles south of Brockton.

"The point where the ill-fated automobile left the highway is a sharp curve at the top of a long slope which has been the scene of several accidents in recent years, and is known locally as Dead-Man's Curve. Police believed that Mr. Harris was speeding south, lost control of his car at the curve, and rolled down the steep hillside, the car bursting into flames at the bottom.

"The fatal accident is believed to have occurred around midnight Thursday. Every particle of the dead man's clothing was burned from his body, which made immediate identification impossible.

"As we go to press there is no definite proof that the driver of Mr. Harris' car was the owner. However, Chief Ollie Hanger has ascertained that the young assistant State's Attorney did drive his car away from Orlando early Thursday evening without telling anyone his destination, and has not been seen since Friday.

"The grief-stricken parents, Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Harris, 1979 Dabney Avenue, Orlando, are unable to offer any explanation for their son's presence at the scene.

"It wasn't until Mr. and Mrs.

Harris arose the next morning that they discovered their son had not come home, and they weren't unduly alarmed then, thinking he might have decided to spend the night with a friend.

"Neither could State's Attorney Elmer Jacobson throw any light on the mystery when interviewed early today, insisting he was positive it was not official business that had brought his assistant to Brockton Thursday night, though this city does lie within the jurisdiction of the Orlando district. He could only comment that his assistant was a brilliant and conscientious attorney and that his untimely death was a great loss to the community.

"One false lead which police had hoped might be a vital clue in the mystery petered out this morning when authorities interviewed Dr. Joseph R. Winestock, Superintendent of the Brockton Sanitarium on the outskirts.

"Previously, John Agnolo, attendant at the Squaredale Filling Station situated on the Orlando highway a half mile north of Brockton, had reported to police that he believed Mr. Harris had been the driver of a car answering to the description of the burned vehicle that had stopped for gasoline about nine o'clock Thursday evening, who had asked Mr. Agnolo for directions to the Brockton Sanitarium.

"Agnolo told the police that

he'd drawn a map to the place with precise directions on it . . . left at the first traffic light . . . straight out East Ave. about two miles to the sign and take the left fork for a quarter of a mile. The attendant also had the vague impression that there was another person in the car, but he wasn't too sure about it. Neither could he positively identify a photograph of Harris."

"Dr. Winestock said that his only visitor that Thursday evening had been a young man who had visited his sister at the sanitarium. Since the man vaguely fit the description of Harris, the police were satisfied that Mr. Agnolo was mistaken."

Shayne skimmed the rest of the article, which lauded the late attorney's brief career. Then he laid aside the paper and went down to a late lunch. It wasn't until he had his coffee served that he tried again to study the pattern of it.

Thursday night was the same night Amy Buttrell had mysteriously appeared at the local hospital. And she had fingered Shayne for three hoodlums here in Brockton last night after she had supposedly been taken away to Miami by a father who seemed not to exist. By the grace of God, Shayne had escaped their ministrations, whereupon a killer appeared at his office door the next morning armed with a gun carrying a clipping from the Brockton paper. Why had Dr. Phil-

brick tried to have Shayne turned away from his office without interviewing him? Was it solely because he had learned Shayne was a private detective who had been arrested by local police the night before, or had he suspected why the detective wanted to see him . . . and wished to avoid answering questions about the girl? About Miss Buttrell . . . if that was her name. There was no proof as yet, Shayne reminded himself, that her name was Buttrell. Her father had *said* he was Amos Buttrell, but he had also said he was at the Roney Plaza for the season. Since the second statement was false, he might have given a false name as well. No one had checked the man's identity. They were pleased enough to have a man of evident wealth identify the girl and take her away. Glad to have her bill paid and to be relieved of the responsibility.

But why would a father lie about his identity under those circumstances? Because he knew his daughter had been engaged in some criminal activities and wanted to cover up for her? Could be. Also, could be a hundred other reasons.

Shayne poured a second cup of coffee, lit another cigarette, and again carefully went over the clipping similar to that found in the pocket of a gunman who had been waiting at his Miami office.

An assistant State's Attorney from Orlando who had been burned to death in his wrecked car the same night Amy Buttrell (call her that

for want of a better name) had been brought to the hospital by an unidentified motorist in a state of shock.

It was too much to think the possession of the clipping had been mere coincidence. It indicated a definite connection between the girl and Randolph Harris. Both injured near Brockton the same night. Her participation in the attack on Shayne last night, and the hood's unexplained appearance at his office this morning.

Orlando! Randolph Harris lived in Orlando, forty miles north of Brockton. And a Professor Henderson lived in Orlando also. Father of a girl who looked enough like Amy Buttrell so that the professor had feared he recognized her from the newspaper picture. Professor Henderson had been greatly relieved, Dr. Philbrick had stated, when he learned that the girl could not possibly be his daughter because she had already been identified.

Obviously, the professor would not have pressed his inquiries beyond that point.

Shayne called for his check, tipped the waitress, and went up to his room. He got the long distance operator and asked her to locate a Professor Henderson in Orlando, on the faculty of Rollins College in Winter Park. While waiting for the call to go through, he dug into it further. There had to be a connection, he told himself. Suppose the girl *was* Professor Henderson's

daughter! That meant that Amos Buttrell was an imposter. That for reasons of his own he had identified the girl as his daughter Amy and taken her away with him.

There would have been nothing to prevent it. Suffering from amnesia, the girl could not protest that he was not her father. In her state, she must have accepted him without question. Just as Dr. Philbrick and the authorities had accepted him without question. And he hadn't taken her back to Miami. That much was clear. Because she had still been in Brockton last night.

His telephone rang and the operator put him through to Orlando.

Shayne said, "Professor Henderson? My name is Michael Shayne and I'm calling you from Brockton."

"Shayne? In what connection . . .?" The voice was precise and cultivated.

Shayne said swiftly, "I'm a detective working on the case of the girl who had an accident here last Thursday night and suffered amnesia. I understand you telephoned from Orlando Friday after seeing her picture in the paper, thinking it might be your daughter."

"Jean. Yes. I was worried when I saw the picture so like my Jean. But it wasn't, you know. She had been positively identified as someone else before I telephoned."

"I know." Shayne said quietly. "It now seems that the first identification of the girl may have been an error. Just to make certain . . . has

your daughter turned up safe in the meantime?"

"Why, yes. That is . . . I have no reason to assume otherwise. You see, Mr. Shayne, I didn't see how it could possibly be Jean in Brockton even when I telephoned. She had no reason to be near Brockton that night. But when I saw that picture so like her and because of the . . . ah . . . coincidence of the previous accident to her younger sister which was naturally strongly in my mind, I thought that it might *be* Jean. You say, now, that there might be some mistake?" The professor's voice faltered thinly into disbelieving silence.

"I don't want to imply anything," said Shayne soothingly. "Do you mean you still aren't sure it wasn't your daughter?"

"I . . . well, I made no further inquiries. I assumed she was with her friends on a week's cruise. They had planned to sail from Apalachicola early Friday morning. Since Brockton is not even on the bus route from here to Apalachicola, I did not consider it possible for Jean to have been injured in Brockton. Yet, with Jeanette's recent accident so strongly in my thoughts, I wondered . . . do you see?"

"Not quite," sighed Shayne. "You say she went by bus Thursday afternoon to Apalachicola to go on a cruise with friends?"

"Exactly. And I assume, of course, that she is on the cruise with them now. Certainly, they would have in-

formed me before this had she not arrived safely."

"Haven't you heard from her since Thursday?"

"No."

"Do you know the names of her friends in Apalachicola?"

"Oh, yes. Certainly. Mr. and Mrs. Larch. Old family friends. I assure you, Mr. Shayne. . . ."

"Can you telephone them?" interrupted Shayne. "If we know your daughter is with them, it will simplify our investigation here."

"But they are somewhere in the Gulf on a sailboat," protested Henderson. "I tried to telephone Mr. Larch Friday after I had seen the picture I thought might be Jean. They had already left, early that morning."

"And there's no possibility of contacting them now?"

"None, I'm afraid."

"Do you *know* your daughter took the bus to Apalachicola?"

"No, I didn't actually see her board the bus. She had planned to take the six o'clock bus and, so far as I know, she did so. For the love of heaven, Mr. Shayne, what's this all about? Do you suspect the amnesia victim may have been Jean after all?"

"We don't want to worry you unduly," said Shayne. "Probably not. But please answer a couple more questions. Did your daughter know Randolph Harris?"

"Harris? Who is he?"

"A young Orlando attorney pre-

viously connected with the State Attorney's office there. Did she know him?"

"I'm certain she doesn't. Jean is only nineteen, and since her mother died three years ago we have been very close. I think I can say I have her complete confidence and know all of her friends. She never mentioned a Randolph Harris."

"One more thing. You spoke twice about an accident to a younger daughter and the coincidence that led you to wonder if the other girl could be Jean even though you were quite positive she was on a bus to Apalachicola at the time."

"Yes. Jeanette. If you are a detective in Brockton, you certainly must recall the tragic details. Less than a month ago, it was. A terrible shock. Jeanette was such a gay and fun-loving girl. Quite unlike her older sister, Jean, who inherited my traits, I fear, rather than those of her mother. With Jeanette's loss so fresh in my mind, you can understand why I felt impelled to investigate the newspaper photograph that resembled my Jean."

"Of course," said Shayne heartily. He did not admit that he wasn't on the Brockton force and knew nothing about the prior accident. He thanked the professor and took his address saying he would call on him in Orlando later to check a few minor details. The professor said he would be home all afternoon and urged him to come. He seemed pathetically anxious to question the de-

tective about this new development.

Shayne cut him off gently and found himself sweating as he hung up.

Another fatal accident in Brockton a month ago. Altogether too many accidents in a short space of time for such a small place.

A young girl from Orlando named Jeanette Henderson a month ago. A young attorney from Orlando last Thursday night. A girl who looked enough like Jeanette's sister to be her double also last Thursday night. And last night a pair of cold-blooded killers had set him up for what would have been the fourth "accident" victim within a month in Brockton.

Entirely too damned many accidents!

8.

On an impulse, Shayne hunted through the phonebook for the name of the older of the two patrolmen who had arrested him. Grimes, he remembered, was an old-timer who, by his friendly actions at the court, might be able to give him some information from the official police records.

He placed a call to the officer's home and blessed his hunch when the affable cop agreed to meet him for a few beers before going on duty at four.

Shayne drew him out slowly, carefully, as the two sat in a small bar in the center of Brockton. He took

Grimes' joshing good naturedly, noting the policeman's condemnation of his partner's hasty action the other night. Grimes indicated that the local Police Chief, Ollie Hanger, was not partial to private detectives — or to anyone else for that matter.

Pursuing the quick police action on traffic violation, Shayne asked if this cut down on automobile accidents. Grimes quickly admitted that recent accidents didn't show it, that last night, for example, a town character named Mule Larsen had been a hit-run victim on the highway just outside of town.

Shayne quickly picked up Grimes' characterization of Larsen as a town tough. Did a peaceful town like Brockton have anything to offer guys like that? Grimes seemed to sidestep this one by countering that any town might have some kind of racket going on. He wouldn't know. A direct question about Gene brought a similar denial of recognition, but something in the policeman's face told Shayne that he was stepping into bad territory. No cop in any town liked to talk about the rackets that might exist in his locality.

He switched the talk back to the accident rate again. What about that Harris accident last week? Grimes admitted that was just a case of stupid driving. Hadn't he been driving to see his sister in a hospital? Grimes was as frank as a police blotter on this one. The gas

station attendant's lead hadn't checked out. The route Harris had taken was off the route Agnolo claimed to have given his customer.

And it wasn't a hospital, Grimes pointed out, it was a private sanitarium used by out-of-towners. Dip-sos, mostly, he guessed. Expensive, and Brockton people avoided it. Anyway, the Police Chief had personally checked that Agnolo lead with the doctor at the sanitarium.

Noting again, a look of reluctance on Grimes' face as he spoke about the sanitarium, Shayne avoided mention of Amy Buttrell. Instead he picked up the accident theme again.

Jeanette Henderson? Grimes recalled the accident after a moment's thought. That had been the pretty young kid who'd gone off the road in an old Ford coupe on another bad curve. Some driver had pulled her out and driven her to the nearest place — the sanitarium. But she'd been banged up so bad that she had died before they could do anything for her. As far as the accident itself, the police weren't sure because the man who'd brought her in, hadn't stopped long enough to identify himself. Probably one of those guys who didn't want his wife to know what direction he'd been coming from last night.

Shayne switched the subject abruptly to the call from the bar which had not been answered by the police. Grimes, obviously nettled by the implication of inefficiency by the local police system, invited

Shayne to check the apparent slip-up at headquarters.

The Brockton police headquarters was housed in a three-story brick building. It also contained the jail and courthouse familiar to Shayne. Grimes led him through a corridor, saying, "The file room's at the end. Only take us a minute to check. . . ."

He broke off abruptly as a door opened in front of them and a big man stepped out.

He was fat as well as being big in every direction. Well over six feet, with spreading shoulders and a thick torso, he had a huge paunch that hung out over his belt, his eyes were almost hidden by puffy rolls of fat on each cheek, and triple chins sat beneath an absurdly small and pouting mouth.

He stopped in the center of the wide passageway, filling it to such an extent that there was scarcely room for a man to pass on either side, and glowered at Grimes and Shayne as they approached.

Grimes slowed uncertainly and said in a placating voice, "Hi, Ollie. This here's Mr. Shayne from Miami. Chief Hanger, Mr. Shayne. Being in the business himself, Mr. Shayne wants. . . ."

Chief Ollie Hanger snorted loudly.

"Get him out of here, Grimes. We do all right in Brockton without any help from private cops. Better get on out of town, Mister, before Burke or some of the others like him run you in again."

Shayne shrugged his own wide shoulders. He said mildly, "Tell Burke and your other tough boys that I'll be expecting them next time." He turned abruptly and walked outside.

Fifteen minutes later he was speeding out of town toward Orlando.

9.

The Henderson house in Orlando was a neat stuccoed bungalow on a quiet side street, flanked by similar bungalows on either side. The door was opened by a precise little man with a perfectly bald head, wearing rimless glasses and a worried expression on his rather pale face. He wore neatly pressed brown trousers with a white shirt and neat bow tie, and a shabby corduroy smoking jacket, and had a short-stemmed meersch-chaum pipe in his hand. He looked up at Shayne and said nervously, "Mr. Shayne . . . ?"

The detective nodded.

"Please come in." The professor led the way to a comfortably though shabbily furnished living room, paused vaguely in the center, and motioned Shayne to a seat.

"Now, sir. I understand you are a detective from Brockton."

"Yes, Professor Henderson. Don't be alarmed, but there's some question about the identity of the girl who was previously identified as Miss Buttrell. Have you checked definitely on your daughter's present whereabouts?"

"No, Mr. Shayne. I called Roy Larch's home after you telephoned, but there was no answer. The entire family is on that cruise and I'm sure Jean is with them. Certainly," he went on nervously, "If anything had happened to prevent Jean's arrival, Roy and Maria Larch would certainly have contacted me before sailing without her."

Shayne agreed. "For your sake, I hope you're right." He noticed a framed picture of two young girls on the mantelpiece and got up to look at it more closely. They were about seventeen and fifteen, he judged. The younger had a piquant, laughing face that brought a sense of bubbling gaiety into the quiet room. The other girl had a broad forehead and a serenely beautiful face. She was, undoubtedly, the girl in the white dress in the Brockton bar the preceding evening—the original of the *Courier* photograph—the girl who had been positively identified as Amy Buttrell.

The professor had risen and stood close beside Shayne.

Shayne continued to look straight ahead at the picture of the sisters. His eyes stung and he set his teeth together tightly. He cleared his throat, "They're lovely girls, Professor. I certainly hope Jean is safe and this is a false alarm. It seems quite a coincidence, though, that both accidents happened near Brockton. What was your younger daughter doing in the vicinity when the wreck occurred?"

"Jeanette?" The professor turned troubled eyes on him. "She was seventeen and had had her own license for a year. She was a very careful driver, I thought. Never an accident before . . . that . . ." Pain contracted his ascetic features.

"I think the cause of the wreck was never determined," said Shayne thoughtfully.

"No." The professor said. "Your police theorized that she lost control on that curve and went over the bank. Some passing motorist rescued her from the wreckage and rushed her to the nearest hospital but she succumbed to an emergency operation without regaining consciousness. And he disappeared in the night without leaving his name or telling exactly what happened."

"I didn't have any part in that investigation," Shayne said. "Was there any possibility that the other motorist was somehow responsible for your daughter's accident, and *that* motivated his abrupt disappearance after doing what he could for her?"

"The possibility was mentioned. However, I believe a careful examination of her car proved conclusively no other automobile was involved. It didn't matter to me at the time. Nothing would have given Jeanette back to me."

Shayne switched to a new point. "I asked you earlier if Jean was acquainted with a young Orlando attorney named Randolph Harris?"

"No, Mr. Shayne. I'm quite certain she was not."

"Did Jeanette know him?"

The professor seemed less positive in his reply this time.

"I'm not certain that she did," he said stiffly. "But I must say that Jeanette had a wide circle of friends. She might have known him. Jeanette was different from her sister. She led a gayer life. It was difficult for me to draw the line, especially since her mother's death. But her mother felt the girls should have freedom and responsibility. I respected her wishes . . . and I cannot blame her for what happened."

Shayne agreed. There were two more things he wanted. He asked the professor for Jean's photograph and where he could locate Lois Dougan. Before leaving he told the professor where he could be reached in Brockton. He didn't tell the old man that his daughter was in Brockton, apparently consorting with a gang of thugs. The old man had grief enough. Better to wait. At the moment the only thing he could see was that three young people from Orlando had had "accidents" in Brockton.

10.

Locating Lois Dougan at Winter Park was simple. Shayne met her outside her dormitory and she consented readily to talk with him in his car after he identified himself. She was a tall, pleasant-faced young-

ster of about seventeen and his first impression of her was that she was a sensible, level-headed kid.

Shayne watched her reactions carefully as he questioned her. She quickly corroborated the professor's information that she and his daughter were close friends and that Jeanette was a lively and popular girl with many friends. As far as she knew, her late friend did not know Harris. She freely admitted that Jeanette had been on her way to visit her on the night of her fatal accident.

"When did you first learn about the accident?"

"Early next morning. Her father phoned me." She shuddered and bit her lip. I couldn't believe it. She was so full of life and . . ."

"But hadn't you expected her the night before?" Shayne broke in quickly. "Do you mean to say you just calmly went to sleep when she didn't arrive that night? Without calling her dad? Weren't you worried?"

Lois stared at him, momentarily, her chin set and eyes flashing. "What right have you to ask these questions? I had nothing to do with her accident."

"I don't blame you, Lois, but I'm not snooping for the fun of it. Do you know her sister's in great danger, too?"

Amazement and disbelief spread over her face as Shayne told her that Jean Henderson was in trouble in Brockton and that he was con-

vinced that her sister's accident was connected with it in some way. But he was working in the dark and couldn't she give him any information so that he might at least save Professor Henderson the additional grief of losing his remaining daughter?

Jeanette had faked the visit to her, so that she could spend the weekend with her boy friend. He was a local boy, about twenty-three and somewhat wild. He hung around with a motorcycle crowd. Jeanette loved him and they'd been secretly engaged. She knew her father wouldn't approve of him, wouldn't let him come into the house. And she also had ideas that couples should be together before they were married, so she planned to meet him that week and then spend the last two days at the Dougan Farm near Brockton before returning home.

"Where did they plan to go?" Shayne asked carefully.

"I don't know. She said they had some place picked out where they'd pretend to be married and no one would ever know."

"Did they take her car?"

"I don't know. I guess so. I don't think Will has one."

Shayne drew in a long breath. "So he was probably with her in the car when it happened."

"I . . . I guess maybe he was," she agreed miserably.

Shayne said, "I won't repeat anything you tell me. Look, did Jean know anything about her plan?"

"Gosh no! I'm sure she didn't even know about Jeanette being engaged. Jeanette wouldn't dare tell *her*. Jean's not a prude, but she wouldn't have understood or approved. She would have done something to prevent it if she had known. I just don't understand about her now," faltered Lois. "What kind of danger is she in? Why is she in Brockton? Does Professor Henderson know about it?"

"Not yet. He isn't going to know if I can help it until Jean is safely home. Where can I find this Will Lomax?"

II.

Will Lomax was a tall, lean boy about twenty-three years old. His face was dark and a lock of black hair slanted downward across his forehead. He was handsome in a daredevil sort of way.

Shayne found him lounging alone, in front of the town drugstore Lois had mentioned. The big detective identified him and pushed him into the Hudson before the startled youth knew what had hit him. Shayne got in beside him. "Who are you?" Lomax asked sullenly. "And what you want to know?"

"I'm a friend of Professor Henderson's, for one thing. I want to know all about that trip you were taking with Jeanette when she was killed a month ago. She was underage, and you can be held for contributing to the delinquency of a

minor. I don't want to hurt the professor by having it come out in the open, but that's up to you."

Will Lomax turned incredulously as he spoke, and Shayne had a definite impression that there was gladness and relief in the black eyes. That this wasn't the question he had expected and feared, and the boy's voice confirmed that impression as he spoke.

"You're nuts, Mister. I wasn't near Brockton that night and I can prove it. I didn't even know anything about it until I saw it in a paper two days later. Sure, I dated her sometimes even if her old man did treat me like dirt under his feet, but I hadn't seen her for a week before she had the accident."

"Were you waiting for her to join you some place that night?"

"I sure wasn't." Will's upper lip curled away from his teeth and his voice had a note of jeering triumph. "I was in R.O.T.C. camp at Gainsville when it happened. You can check on it easy enough. Bed-check at nine every night and not a damned pass from camp for two whole weeks. I don't know what kind of bee you got in your bonnet. We were both sore because I had to go for spring training the same time as her vacation, and she was going to visit with a girl in Diston. Name of Lois Dougan. You can ask her."

Shayne didn't bother to tell him he had already asked Lois. Will's voice and manner bore the strong stamp of truth. It would be a simple

matter to check his statement, of course. He'd be a fool to make it if it weren't true.

"What about Randy Harris?" Shayne demanded.

"Harris?" The youth's jaw fell open slackly. "Never heard of him. Wait a minute. You mean that lawyer over in Orlando that got burned up in his car last week? What about him?"

"You sure Jeanette wasn't two-timing you with him?"

"Sure I'm sure, Mister." Will's voice was sullenly dogged. "She wasn't two-timing me, period. She was my girl and we were going to get married as soon as she was eighteen." He took on a sort of youthful dignity as he said this, and his hand reached out to the door.

12.

Just outside of Brockton, Shayne pulled up at the Squareddeal Filling Station where Agnolo worked. The young attendant was there and Shayne found him intelligent and coöperative. He reiterated the story he'd given to the police. He thought the fellow who'd been killed in the automobile accident was Harris and he'd given him instructions to get to the Sanitarium. But he wasn't too certain about the identification or the fact that there had been someone in the car with him. He'd thought so, but he couldn't see how it could be the same guy, being that the directions he had given the

guy were way off from the accident scene.

Shayne asked for directions to the Sanitarium, tipped the young fellow, and drove off. He decided against checking the accident scene, figuring the place had been too well covered by the police.

The directions were easy to follow. He came to the spot where the road forked and turned left where the sign said, "Brockton Sanitarium." He pulled up in front of an iron gate that barred the roadway to a large well-kept estate. A sign above the gate read *Brockton Sanitarium*.

That was as far as he got. A small elderly man in his sixties came out of a brick shelter within the gate and let him know firmly that he couldn't get in without an appointment card. Deciding it was useless to argue, Shayne backed away.

He was a mile beyond the fork when he noticed a car behind him, coming fast. He had no way of knowing whether it came from the sanitarium or the right fork. Deep in thought, Shayne forgot it momentarily, then wondered why it hadn't passed him at the rate of speed it was going when he had first noticed it.

Shayne braked hard, with his pursuer some 300 yards behind him, intending to cut him off. But the second driver increased his speed and shot past him. It was a light gray sedan with a lone man, hunched forward over the wheel. Shayne caught only a glimpse of a snap brim hat

pulled low over the driver's head.

The car cut sharply into a side street and Shayne decided against trying to catch it in unfamiliar streets.

He thought the man in the gray sedan had been Gene. He hadn't seen his face, but the tilt of the snap-brim hat was definitely reminiscent of the man who had tried to kill him. He drove on into town, trying to make it add up. If Gene *had* followed him from the sanitarium . . . if his slowly awakening suspicions about the nature of the place were correct . . .

Two and two still added up to six no matter how he twisted the meager facts at his disposal. Jean Henderson was still the key to the puzzle. *Why* had a stranger positively identified her as his daughter and taken her from the hospital? *What* had she been doing last night in Brockton? *Why* had she come up to speak to him as he sat alone in a bar-room booth that he had entered by the merest chance? *Why* had her apparent recognition of him brought on the immediate attack by Gene and his companions?

The image of the girl was clearly before his eyes as he had seen her last night standing timidly inside the door of the bar-room.

So it was almost like a physical materialization of his own concentrated thoughts when he saw the figure in the white silk dress with its distinctive green embroidery of Mexican symbols moving toward

him on the crowded sidewalk across the street.

Today, she wore a wide-brimmed Leghorn hat that hid her features from Shayne, but he would have recognized that distinctive dress anywhere, in any crowd. She was almost opposite him when he saw her, and he was in a stream of slow-moving traffic that would not allow him to stop at once.

He looked ahead frantically for a parking space, breathed a deep sigh of thanks when he saw an empty spot along the curb a few car lengths ahead. He parked quickly.

She was sauntering along looking in the shop windows, and Shayne came up behind her fast. He slowed into step beside her and looked down at the spreading brim of straw that hid her face, and then without speaking, he took her bare upper arm in a firm grip and stopped her on the sidewalk.

There was a gasp of astonishment.

He had never seen this girl before in his life.

13.

She was about twenty-five, with a plump, over-rouged face. Her mouth was small and petulant, but the indignation in her blue eyes slowly faded away as she looked the rangy red-head up and down.

Damn it, he couldn't be mistaken about the dress. There couldn't be two exactly alike in a town like Brockton. It was obviously hand-

embroidered even to Shayne's untutored eye, not something that came off a New York assembly line.

She said, "Well . . . ?" and looked down at his big hand still tightly holding her bare arm.

He didn't let go. He grinned, "At the risk of sounding trite . . . I did actually mistake you for someone else."

From her expression, he gathered that she didn't know the meaning of the word trite. But she seemed willing to be lenient about his mistake. She tossed her head coquettishly and said, "Whyn't you run along then and look for her some more?"

Shayne said, "Why bother, now that I've found you? How about letting me buy you a drink to make up for my rudeness?"

"Why, I wouldn't mind, I guess. Not," she added sedately, "that I drink with strange men as a rule. But, seeing you did make a mistake, like you say. . . ."

He wasted little time. He steered her into a cocktail lounge down the street, ordered drinks, and identified himself. He told her she was wearing a dress, part of an expensive shipment which had been stolen and that she had better tell where she'd gotten it if she didn't want to go to jail.

She scared easily and told him that she'd gotten it from a girl who just started working in the *Union Restaurant* where she was employed as a waitress. The new girl seemed so anxious to get rid of it that she

had exchanged a plain cotton dress for it right then and there. The girl had been wearing it when she came into the restaurant this morning. Mr. Entwistle hired her on the spot because one of the girls had quit. She'd be working there now.

Shayne said, "Fine. Let's go." He took her arm and they went out the door, blinking in the light of late afternoon sun.

The sidewalk was momentarily deserted as the woman turned back in the direction she had been walking from when Shayne first saw her.

He didn't notice the light gray sedan parked directly in front of them at the curb until a loud gunshot shattered the afternoon quiet of Brockton's Main Street.

The girl sagged against him as two more shots followed swiftly. Pain seared the top of Shayne's shoulder and stung his thigh, and he flung himself forward instinctively to cover her body as she crumpled to the sidewalk.

As he went down he caught a glimpse of a low-pulled snap-brim hat above the steering wheel of the gray sedan not six feet away. The car roared away before he could see anything else.

14.

The girl was dead. The first bullet had smashed her throat. Blood gushed from the wound, staining the sidewalk beneath Shayne as he crouched over her body.

An excited group gathered about them swiftly as Shayne slowly pushed himself up despite his wounds. He felt his left shoulder and his hand came away smeared with blood.

An officer came running up and pressed the curious crowd back from Shayne and the dead girl. He snapped at him, "It was a man in a light gray sedan. Plymouth, I think. Get it to your radio fast. The girl is dead."

The officer went to telephone, and a druggist who had emerged from his shop beside the cocktail lounge volunteered first aid. Shayne limped into the drug-store behind him and he got bandages and sulfa powder and bound both wounds so they stopped bleeding. Shayne thanked him and offered to pay for the bandages when he was done, but the druggist refused, insisting he was happy to help.

Shayne walked to the door, stiff-legged, just in time to see a patrol car pull up to the spot where the girl still lay.

Grimes was at the wheel with the officious young officer, Burke, beside him. Shayne ignored the younger man and gave Grimes a terse description of the vehicle and the man in the snap-brim hat. Grimes remained silent when the detective identified him as the man who had run things that night in the bar. Shayne shrugged wearily, got into the patrol car, and they drove off to see Chief Hanger.

At the station, Shayne brushed Burke off, and pushed his way into

the chief's office, slamming the door shut behind him.

Chief Hanger was listening intently to the telephone. He looked up at Shayne, said, "Okay for now," and hung up. The big man settled back on his chair, hands folded over his ponderous belly.

There was a rap on the outer door and Hanger said, "Come."

A clerk entered and showed Hanger a slip of paper. "That's all so far."

He went out briskly as the chief read it. "Florence Dinwiddy. Waitress at the Union Cafe. Died instantly. Probably a forty-five slug." He put the paper down glaring at Shayne. "Why was she bumped, Shayne?"

"Ask the man that triggered her . . . and me. We had a drink in the Elite Bar and walked into it. That's all I know."

"Nuts," said Chief Ollie Hanger. "Was she helping you on something?"

"I never saw her before this afternoon."

"Nuts again. You're in a real bad spot, Shamus. Come clean fast."

"I was driving through last night and stopped for a drink before going to Miami. Your boy Burke picked me up on a parking ticket and slugged me with his partner's help and I spent a pleasant night in your stinking can. So I decided I'd stick around a little and see what makes your town tick."

"So why'd you tell Dr. Philbrick

you were checking on the amnesia case for the girl's father?"

He said, "All right. Buttrell isn't my client. I used that gimmick to get Philbrick to talk. The *Miami Daily News* is interested in the story and I'm getting together the facts for them. Is that legitimate business that my license entitles me to have in Brockton?"

"If it happens to be the truth."

"Call the City Desk and check with Timothy Rourke. He's the one sent me out."

Chief Ollie Hanger said, "I'll maybe do that. And if you're lying I'll throw you into the can for more than one night. Even if you're not, I want to know what your interest was in Florence Dinwiddy that got her killed."

"Didn't you ever have an impulse to buy a pretty girl a drink?"

"Maybe. But I didn't end up murdering her."

Shayne lit a cigarette angrily. "You going to arrest me this time for getting myself shot on your main street?"

"Not this time. But I'm giving you a last warning. Get out of Brockton and stay out."

Shayne turned away, walked out of the office with a slight limp and continued outside. George Grimes was still at the wheel of the police car. Burke was nowhere in sight.

Grimes called to him, "What the hell goes on around here?"

Shayne said, "I wish I knew. First time I ever got pulled in for letting

myself be shot at." His voice and manner were grim. "Which way is Union Street from here?"

"Turn to your left two blocks." Grimes dropped his voice still more. "What you said back there on Main Street. You mean the guy that shot the girl was the one named Gene you mentioned this afternoon?"

"I'm pretty sure it was, George." Shayne stopped and looked down into the worried red face gravely. "That give you any ideas?"

"No," Grimes disclaimed hastily. "That is . . ." He looked around furtively and whispered, "I told you this afternoon I'd maybe seen him around. In Ollie's office, that's where."

15.

There wasn't much business in the Union Cafe when Shayne entered a few minutes later and stopped just inside the front door to look the place over. In the lull before dinner, only three of the tables were occupied.

Shayne walked up to a tall, white-haired man behind a cash register and told him he was looking for his sister. There had been a family argument back home in Orlando, and she'd run away. He'd traced her here through her friend.

"Your sister, eh?" The white-haired man's voice was sympathetic.

Then he saw her. She pushed through swinging doors at the rear gripping a heavily loaded tray tightly

in both hands. Her eyes met Shayne's. She stared, gasped, and dropped the tray.

Shayne strode swiftly to her, taking her arm in his. "I've come to take you home with me, Sis," he said loudly, and pulled her toward the man at the cash register. He grinned with embarrassment at the proprietor and proffered a ten-dollar bill. "I hope that'll pay for the damage, Mister."

She moved beside him silently, unprotesting to his car a few blocks away. He thrust her in on the left hand side of the car, making sure she would not try to break away.

He said quietly, "Move over so I can get in, and don't try anything. Jean. I'm not in a mood for arguments right now."

She went to pieces then, sobbing piteously. "I don't remember . . . anything. You're not my brother . . . You can't be. You're the man that I . . . that I saw in the bar last night. What are you going to do with me?"

He didn't answer until he reached the hotel parking lot and moved up a rear staircase to his room. He put a *do not disturb* sign on the door, double-locked it, and then faced the trembling girl.

She looked directly into his eyes and said tremulously: "I don't know who you are, but I'm not frightened any more. Are you my brother?" Her fingers tightened on his arm.

"Last night," Shayne reminded her, "you walked into a bar-room

and came to my booth and spoke to me. Then all hell broke loose and I got slugged by three of your friends. Why?"

"Because they thought . . . because I stopped at your booth instead of going on to the right one beyond you. I couldn't do it to him," she pleaded tearfully. "Don't you see I couldn't? He'd been so kind to me that night. And he looked so little and defenseless sitting there. And you were so big and . . . and, well, tough-looking. It just came over me all at once when I saw you both. I hadn't planned it that way. But I knew they planned to do something terrible to him as soon as I told them which one he was, so I just couldn't do it to him. You do see why I couldn't don't you?" Her eyes begged him to understand and forgive.

Shayne considered this a moment. "What did Gene have against him? Strong enough to cause him to try and kill me after you pointed me out as the man?"

"I don't know. I just don't know." Jean Henderson shuddered, her blue eyes still pleading for belief. "I knew they might do something awful. When they first asked me, I made the mistake of admitting I had seen his face. But I couldn't describe it to them. He was just sort of ordinary. But that's why they took me to the bar last night. Please tell me what it's all about," she begged. "Why did they keep me locked up in a room? What hap-

pened to my . . . to the man who said he was my father and took me away from the hospital?"

"Let's finish up last night first. What happened to you?"

"I got away from them when you started fighting and Bill came running in to help Gene and the other one. He was outside . . . to keep me from running away. I was supposed to point you out and go out to Bill, who would take me away while Gene and Mule handled you."

"Why didn't you go to the police at once?"

"I was afraid to. I don't know just why, but from things Gene and Bill said, I think they're in with the police in Brockton. And that awful fat Chief of Police! I couldn't face him again."

"When did you meet Ollie Hanger?"

"When Mr. Buttrell came to the hospital. He was there with Doctor Philbrick. I was scared and *felt* there was something wrong. I just didn't *think* he was my father. But he insisted that he was, and I was so dazed and frightened, and so happy to have *somebody* recognize me, that I didn't protest. But later, after Gene and Bill had me locked up, it seemed to me Chief Hanger was awfully anxious to have me go with Mr. Buttrell. I had the impression they knew each other and were sort of in it together. That's why I was afraid of the police."

"You were probably smart," Shayne told her somberly. "Tell me,

what happened after Mr. Buttrell took you away from the hospital?"

"He seemed kind in an oily sort of way. He got into a blue Buick sedan, and he said we'd drive to Miami to have my doctor examine me. We stopped at a drive-in place outside Brockton. I was thirsty and he ordered a chocolate malted for me. I thought it tasted funny and sort of bitter, but I drank it. The next thing I remembered was waking up in that locked room all by myself, and I haven't been out of it since, until last night."

Michael Shayne took a long drink. "It's all over now. You have nothing to be afraid of, and you'll be home with your own father soon. You believe that, don't you? You trust me?"

She said, "Yes," gladly and without hesitation.

Shayne acknowledged the compliment with a grin. "Your name is Jean Henderson," he said slowly. "You live in Orlando with your father, Professor Henderson. You're a student at Rollins College where he teaches. Does that mean anything?"

He watched her repeating the name to herself over and over again. She shook her head, her face blank, her eyes disappointed and fearful again. "It just won't come back. Nothing. Nothing at all."

"It will," Shayne told her cheerfully. "Stop trying so hard. It's all there. There's just a physical block caused by your head injury between

conscious memory and your subconscious mind. Let's go back now to what you do remember. What is your first conscious memory?"

"It was night and dark and I was alone stumbling down a strange road," she said in a low monotone as if she had memorized it. "My head ached and I was bruised all over and I didn't know who I was or where I was or how I'd gotten there. I just didn't . . . *know*. I kept walking. Then a car came up behind me and stopped when I waved and this man got out. And I tried to explain. And he was nice and didn't ask many questions. He helped me into the car and said I needed a doctor. And he drove on in the dark for what seemed like a long time, and he said we were going to Brockton and he'd take me to the hospital and drop me off at the door. He asked me to promise to let him drive away without being seen and not to tell anybody what he looked like or anything about him. He said it would just ruin everything for him if his wife found out he was out in that direction that night because she thought he was somewhere else. And he sounded sad and frightened and I felt sorry for him and grateful, and I promised. He dropped me in front of the hospital and drove off fast. When he was out of sight I went in."

He probed again. "Lean back and relax, Jean. I'm going to mention some names. Tell me if any of them evoke anything." She nodded and

tried to relax.

"The Larches, who live in Apalachicola and have a sailboat. Mr. and Mrs. Roy Larch. You were supposed to be cruising the Gulf with the Larches now. Lois Dougan," he continued slowly as she kept silent. "Your younger sister's best friend. Also a student at Rollins. Will Lomax. Another friend of your sister's. The Brockton Sanitarium, Jean. Not the hospital you were taken to. The Sanitarium."

She sat up, her face showing excitement and hope. "It was there! I *know* it was there. Something so dreadful my mind just closed down and refused to admit it. The Brockton Sanitarium! What is it? What should I know about it?"

He continued grimly. "For one thing, Jean, the Brockton Sanitarium is where your younger sister, Jeanette, died last month after an automobile accident."

She paled, shrinking back in the chair from the impact of his words. "My . . . sister . . . died there?" she said weakly. "Oh, God! Why can't I remember *something*? I think I'll die if I don't. I can't go on living this way!" Her voice rose in hysterical shrillness. Her eyes were round and glazed and she beat her clenched fists on the chair.

16.

Shayne cursed himself for bringing the hysteria on and slapped her sharply out of it.

She quieted gradually. "I'm sorry. Please tell me who you are and how you know all these things."

Shayne looked at her broodingly. "I should have told you sooner. I'm a private detective from Miami. My name is Michael Shayne, and many years ago I was married to a girl whom you remind me of very much. You got me into this last night. I'm not sore about that," he added quietly. "It was an honest impulse on your part to protect a man who had been kind to you, and I'm glad you picked me for the scapegoat even if it was pure accident."

"Not knowing why I was attacked last night, I've been digging into things all day. You aren't Amy Buttrell. The Mr. Buttrell who identified you was just a tool used by Gene to get you away from the hospital before your own father came to take you home. I talked to Professor Henderson this afternoon, Jean, and you're a lucky girl to have him for a father. When this mess is cleared up and you're in familiar surroundings, your memory will return all right. Stop worrying about it. This is a perfectly normal course for an amnesia case such as yours to take." He hoped this was true. At least, she brightened as he said this.

He continued. "Right now, there's one thing in your story that I question. Gene didn't know who I was when he assaulted me last night. You see there was a man waiting for me to show up at my office in Miami

this morning who seems to have some connection. . . .

"My God!" Disgust wrinkled his face. "How dumb can a man get? Of course. My wallet. Gene made Mule put it back because they wanted it to look like a straight hit-run accident. But it told them who I was. And when I got away, Gene thought I'd head straight for Miami. So he sent someone, maybe Bill, to finish off the job he and Mule had bungled.

"Now if you can figure out why you were dangerous to them; *why* they went to the trouble to snatch you from the hospital and keep you prisoner for several days."

He stopped, glared down questioning at the girl.

The man had been extremely gentle with her that night, she said. He'd helped her into an old sedan. She couldn't tell what make. He listened to her, soothed her, and as soon as he made sense of her garbled story, he set off for the Brockton City Hospital. It was near town, when he asked her not to reveal any information about it. He told her he didn't want his wife to find out which direction he'd taken into Brockton that night. He'd hinted delicately that it was another woman, that his wife was a cold woman, that love and respect between them had died long ago, and that this new relationship meant everything in the world to him. But, unfortunately, every cent he had was invested in a local business which was under his wife's

name. If she knew he were not on a business trip tonight, it would be the end of his only happiness.

When Gene and Bill came to her room last night to take her to the bar, she knew she could never turn her benefactor over to them. He was too kind, too gentle, too meek. He'd been almost fatherly to her. Repeatedly she'd said, "You poor lamb" and "dear child." Again and again he'd spoken of "loved ones" who would claim her as soon as the proper authorities took charge. He'd seemed so religious — almost like a minister.

Shayne scarcely heard her final words. Something about the outward appearance of the man he had scarcely glanced at, the man in the rear booth, coupled with Jean's chance comparison made him sit up and snap his fingers.

Phrases that only a certain type of man would use in normal conversation. A minister, or perhaps a doctor. No, neither. The man had explained to Jean that he was tied to Brockton by a small business which he did not control and which did not earn him enough to plan a breakaway.

A small businessman who talked the way that man had talked to Jean on the road. It came to Shayne suddenly. Jean was beginning to talk again, but he cut her off. He skimmed quickly through the yellow Classified pages of the phone book. There couldn't be many such businesses listed in a town of forty thousand.

There were only four listings under the heading he wanted. He started to copy the four addresses, then hesitated. Not knowing the town, he would have to ask directions to get to each one. It might take hours going from one to another until he struck the right man. He picked up the phone, grinning reassuringly at Jean who stared at him in bewilderment.

He said, "I'll explain in just a moment. First, I want to invite your friend up to have a talk with us." He asked the hotel operator for the first number on the list.

When a cool female voice replied, he said, "I'd like to speak to the proprietor, please."

She said, "Certainly, I'll call Mr. Johnson."

Mr. Johnson had a rounded voice that might have been sonorous had it not obviously been hushed. "Yes, sir? What service may I render?"

"I'm not well acquainted in Brockton," Shayne paused and gulped. "And my wife. . . . It was very sudden. Could you come at once to my room in the Manor Hotel to discuss the details privately? I can't leave . . ."

"Precisely. I understand only too well, sir, and our services are yours to command at once. Ah . . . your name?"

"Mr. Shayne. Room four-sixteen."

Shayne hung up and called the second number. A mellifluous voice informed him that Mr. Magner of

the Final Tryst Funeral Home was entirely at his disposal. Having been assured by Mr. Magner that he was, indeed, the proprietor and owner of Final Tryst, Shayne made the same arrangements with him and hung up.

His third call brought forth the information that the owner of the Home was in Arizona on a long vacation and had been gone for two weeks.

A pleasantly seductive female voice cooed back at him after the fourth call, and when Shayne asked for the proprietor, she assured him that he was speaking to her at that moment. When she reiterated that she was *Miss Elroy*, Shayne refused her pleasantly and hung up. He turned to Jean and said confidently. "Sit down and relax. He'll be here very shortly."

"Who will be here?"

"Either Mr. Johnson or Mr. Magner," he told her. "I'm inclined to pick Magner as my candidate right now. Of the Final Tryst, you know?" he ended blandly.

"But how do you know it's a funeral director?" she asked. She looked almost spirited again.

"Who else," demanded Shayne, "would call your relatives 'your loved ones' when he mentioned how worried they must be about you? Who else . . . in business for himself as he told you he was? And think of the meek little man sitting in the rear booth last night. He must be an undertaker." He laughed confidently

and poured himself a drink while he waited for the two undertakers.

17.

Shayne was glad the man had turned out to be an undertaker instead of a plumber when his bell rang some ten minutes later. He opened the door and found a short, rotund man with a cherubic, moon-like face that expressed tactful sympathy for his host's supposed bereavement.

He intoned, "Mr. Shayne? Johnson is my name, sir. You asked me . . ."

"I know I did." Shayne blocked the doorway and made no move to step aside. "I'm sorry to have bothered you, Mr. Johnson, but I'm afraid I've changed my mind in the interim. Later, perhaps? The next time something of this sort happens. . . ."

He shut the door and listened to words scarcely ever uttered by undertakers. He could still hear them as the elevator descended. Several minutes later the door bell rang again. Shayne recognized the mild, horselike face immediately, and he took his arm firmly. The smaller man gasped and tried to shrink back when he saw the detective's rugged face, but Shayne pulled him forward through the door.

Mr. Wagner stood aside helplessly, his face ashen and his eyes flitting nervously from the girl to Shayne. He gulped deeply and said

in a high, thin voice, "You . . . are the man last night, aren't you?" He wet his lips desperately, "And . . . and Miss Buttrell there . . .?"

"Not Buttrell," Shayne said flatly. He pushed Wagner into a chair. "We're going to have a long talk, so make yourself comfortable. Her name is Jean Henderson, the girl you picked up on the road and ducked away after dropping her at the hospital."

"I don't . . . I . . . if you knew how terribly I felt last night, sir, when I saw that terrible thing happen. . . . It was some terrible mistake. I never expected to see her. I'd thought I was perfectly safe coming there . . . that she was in Miami and no one could possibly recognize me. I was petrified when they assaulted you. I beg you to understand and forgive me for not speaking up manfully to say there had been a mistake."

Shayne said, "It doesn't matter now. Stop snivelling and pull yourself together. Who were they and why did they jump me?"

"I recognized only one of them, and him only by sight," muttered the distraught undertaker. "His name is Eugene Forbes, I believe. His reputation in Brockton is not good. He has . . . well . . . a connection with the Sanitarium. That's why he was there . . . to get me. It was foolhardy of me to think I could successfully challenge the Sanitarium. But I had worked out such a careful plan. And I was only

asking for ten thousand dollars, for my silence. It was so little to them, yet it meant so much to me."

"You were blackmailing the Sanitarium?" Shayne said harshly.

"Why . . . about her. The night I found her wandering along the road with no memory of what had happened. I didn't realize the truth that night and I saw no sign of the car then. Later when I read about Mr. Harris burning up in his car at the bottom of the ravine, I realized that was almost exactly the spot where I had found her, and that she must have been with him when it was wrecked. And him being a State's Attorney, and that in the paper about him asking his way to the Sanitarium earlier that evening . . . well, I put two and two together and made four, Mr. Shayne."

Mr. Magner looked at Jean hesitantly. "I've just suddenly realized. . . . Did you say her name is Jean *Henderson*?"

"That's right." Shayne followed his glance. She sat stiffly, her hands clasped tightly together, her blue eyes excited.

"I . . . She . . . had a sister named Jeanette who is supposed to have been killed in another automobile accident near here a month ago." Mr. Magner seemed tortured with fear and indecision. "Can I trust you? What is your interest in this matter? Who are you, sir?"

"I'm a Miami detective. I want to settle scores with Gene . . . and those behind him. What goes on at

that sanitarium, Magner? What sort of secrets do they keep locked up behind a steel fence?"

"It is widely rumored in Brockton that most of the patients are young women who . . . who come there for illegal operations. You . . . ah . . . understand?" He darted an embarrassed glance at Jean and Shayne said it for him:

"An abortion mill, eh? Seems rather a small town to support anything like that."

"They don't come from Brockton. It's said that they consistently refuse to admit any local patients. Their clientele is drawn from larger cities throughout the state . . . and they charge fabulous prices."

"So that's the sanitarium?" said Shayne grimly: "I guessed something of the sort. What about Jeanette Henderson's accident?"

"Her death was not the result of an accident. I had . . . ah . . . to . . . ah . . . prepare her mortal remains after she passed away, and I am prepared to swear that her death was definitely the result of an illegal operation during which she succumbed while under the anesthetic. I suspect they deliberately wrecked her car on the highway and then told the story about her having been brought to them for emergency care during which she died on the operating table."

"Wasn't there an autopsy?" demanded Shayne.

"There was not."

"Did you report your suspicions?"

"No, Mr. Shayne. I couldn't." His face was a tragic mask of fear and self-hatred. "I am in business here, as you know. I freely confess it was weakness and fear that silenced me. But it was easy to be silent, and where could I turn? Dr. Winestock at the Sanitarium is the brother-in-law of our chief of police, Ollie Hanger. Chief Hanger investigated the Henderson's death personally, and arranged to have me take charge of the remains. I didn't dare speak up."

A choked gasp from Jean's throat brought both their heads around to her. Her eyes were wide and staring. "Jeanette," she whispered as though in agony. "*Jeanette!* I . . . I'm beginning to remember."

18.

Shayne was instantly by her side, peering down into her eyes and her contorted face. "Take it easy, Jean. Easy."

Her voice was rising shrilly and Shayne clapped his hand over her mouth. He said grimly, "You've got to help us, Jean. Don't go to pieces yet. Think back now to a month ago. You suspected your sister was pregnant though she denied it. Did you know she was going to the Brockton Sanitarium for an abortion?"

"No. I don't think I knew. It's still hazy. I remember her clearly. I remember I was worried when she wouldn't tell me. And I remem-

ber . . ." She shuddered. "I remember now that she died."

He turned back to Magner. "So you figured they had tried the same thing again with Randolph Harris and the girl, but that she survived somehow and got back to the road where you picked her up."

Exactly what did you do?"

"Well, I telephoned the Sanitarium first, from a pay-station, and I disguised my voice. I told Dr. Winestock I wanted ten thousand dollars in old hundred-dollar bills for my silence, and that I would call again Monday to explain how the money was to be delivered. The plan seemed safe to me. They had no idea in the world who I was. So far as I knew she . . ." He nodded at Jean. ". . . I thought of her as Miss Butrell, of course, was safely out of their hands and in Miami, and she was the only person who could identify me."

"I selected that bar-room because no one there could possibly know me. I went there Monday morning and took a list of three songs on the juke-box. When I phoned again Monday afternoon I told Dr. Winestock he was to have a man go there at eight o'clock Tuesday night with the money in a long envelope. That he was to put three nickels in the jukebox and punch the numbers of the three songs in the order I gave him. Then he was to sit in a vacant booth and order a drink, and secretly fasten the envelope underneath the table with scotch tape, and then leave. I planned to be there at eight

watching it all, ready to pick up the envelope after he left at my leisure. I was waiting in the rear booth. I simply sat frozen in my seat and died a thousand deaths while *she* walked into the bar back toward me.

"Then . . . she stopped at your booth instead. I couldn't hear what she said because Gene and that other big tough came in right behind her and . . . well, you know better than I do what happened then."

Jean spoke in a quavering voice as he finished, "It's all come straight in my mind now, Mr. Shayne. It's like a miracle, the way everything has suddenly clicked into place. I went to the Sanitarium with Randolph Harris because of what happened to Jeanette. After her accident, I was cleaning out her personal things and I found a card with the words: *Dr. Winestock. The Brockton Sanitarium.*

"I couldn't believe it. The Brockton Sanitarium was where they had taken her *after* the accident for an emergency operation. But she had written it down there *before* the accident.

"I didn't tell anyone and I brooded about it for days. The more I thought . . . with my suspicions about her condition . . . the more I came to believe that she had intended going to the Sanitarium when she left home supposedly to visit Lois Dougan. And I knew that she had gone to visit a strange doctor in Orlando, a Dr. Jessup, a few days before, and that she was

different and happy when she came back from seeing him. She had been moping for days before that.

"So I decided to see Dr. Jessup myself. I gave him a false name and told him I was a student at Rollins and lived in Miami, and that I was . . . in trouble, and I'd heard from some of the other girls at Rollins that he could help get rid of the baby.

"He told me to show that card at the Sanitarium, and take nine hundred dollars in cash with me, and not let anybody in the world know where I was going, and that everything would be all right.

"I went straight from his office with the card to see Randolph Harris, whom I had met a couple of times at parties. I told him the whole story, and he got excited and said they suspected the Brockton Sanitarium, but never got proof.

"So we planned it for the next week-end," she went on rapidly. "I had a week's cruise planned with some friends in Apalachicola and was supposed to leave by bus Thursday afternoon. Instead I phoned Mrs. Larch that I couldn't make it and for them to go on without me. And Randolph picked me up in his car that evening and we came to Brockton. I showed the card at the gate and they let us in. We had it all fixed I was to say I was pregnant and he was my sweetheart, and he had nine hundred dollars in marked bills to pay for the operation. So we went in and talked to the doctor in

his office, and then they took me off into a side-room to wait while he made the final arrangements.

"And I don't know what happened in the office," she went on with a shudder. "The first thing I knew two men came and grabbed me and hustled me out to Randolph's car and hit me on the head and piled me in the back where he was already lying knocked out. They were Gene and Bill, I know now. I was dazed but not unconscious. I vaguely remember them driving away and stopping and putting us in the front seat and I kept on pretending to be unconscious but held onto the door handle. And they poured gasoline on the car and on Randolph, I guess, and steered it off the road. I fell out as it turned over, and everything went black."

Shayne said, "That's it, then. Harris was absolutely right about calling the State Police in to clean up the mess. There's a station just outside of town." He got up and called the hotel switchboard:

"Get me the State Police barracks, please." A voice spoke through the receiver into his ear at the precise moment that a key grated faintly in the lock of his door. He whirled toward the door and spoke in a low, terse voice into the phone:

"Hold the line open." He rammed the instrument back into his hip pocket with the mouthpiece sticking up and clear, and moved in front of the telephone stand as the door opened and the big muzzle of a .45

preceded the bulk of Chief Ollie Hanger into the room.

Sliding through the opening behind him with sinuous grace was Gene with a faintly pleased smile on his ascetic face and a short-barrelled .38 dangling negligently from his fingers.

19.

Shayne said loudly, "What the hell you mean walking in with a gun like that? You can't use it here. This is the Manor Hotel, for God's sake. In the center of Brockton. Room four-twenty-one of the *Manor Hotel*," he repeated with emphasis. "You're finished, Chief Hanger. You and your chief abortionist from the Sanitarium."

"Yeah?" Hanger kept the muzzle of his gun steady on Shayne's midsection. "Don't forget I'm still the law in Brockton, and if I shoot a man resisting arrest it's nobody's business. My God, you guessed right, Gene. The girl is here. But what in hell are you doing with these two, Magner? Didn't know you were in on this."

Michael Shayne said, "Mr. Magner has been giving us some interesting information about the way your friend murdered Jeanette Henderson a month ago. Eugene Forbes, I think your name is," he looked at the tall man who stood, blank-faced, against the door with the gun still dangling from his fingers. "Of course," Shayne continued conversationally, "You're

already stuck with the murder of that waitress this afternoon on Main Street, and I watched you run down Mule last night and kill him. So even without Mr. Magner's corroboration, I had plenty on you."

"What about these others?" asked Ollie helplessly. "I don't mind at all gunning this goddamn snoopy shamus right here," the chief went on. "But how in hell can I explain the others?"

"I'll take them out with me," Gene suggested easily. "Another accident won't be too many, and they got to be shut up. On your feet, both of you." He kept his voice low.

"Don't be fools," Shayne said over his shoulder harshly to them. "Stay where you are. They can't afford to start any shooting up here in a hotel room until you two are safely out of the way where he can finish you off at his leisure. No matter how much either of them wave a gun, don't move out of your chairs." He turned back to Ollie and asked, "About how far is it out to State Police barracks?"

"About six miles, but it might as well be six hundred far as you're concerned."

"Why no," said Shayne easily. "Six miles is just about a nice distance. In about one minute, give or take thirty seconds, they should be knocking on that door behind Gene. I told you you were through, Ollie. But if you're smart and don't pull that trigger, you should be able to beat a murder rap. Gene's done all

the actual killing, the way I see it. Better let it stay that way."

As he spoke his last word of warning to the chief, Shayne dropped his body in a driving tackle toward Gene's legs that put him beneath the bullet that slammed toward him the instant he moved.

The .38 slid across the floor and Shayne drove his right fist into Gene's face as a thunderous knocking sounded on the door.

Shayne got to his feet, dragging Gene up with him. He shot a look at the bewildered and frightened fat face of Chief Ollie Hanger, who was hesitating while he tried to figure out the best move he could make under the circumstances, and who hesitantly started toward the door when a gruff voice barked outside, "Open up in there. State Police."

"Not yet," Shayne snarled at him, lunging forward to drive the chief away from the door. His left hand gripped Gene's shoulder and held him erect like a rag doll while his right fist slammed as monotonously as a piston into the bloody and smashed features that were no longer distinguishably human.

He didn't stop until two brawny state troopers smashed the door down and hurtled into the room. Then he dropped the mess on the floor at their feet and told them quietly, "I'll go along with you peacefully, boys, and it'll be a pleasure to plead guilty to assault and battery in any degree you want."

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YOU, detective

8—The Metal Finger

BY WILSON HARMAN

SERGEANT PHIL HAMMOND took in the scene at a glance. At the far end of the room, the dead man still sat at his desk, his shirt matted with blood, the handle of the letter opener sticking up out of his chest like a finger pointing straight at the ceiling. In back of the desk, the afternoon sun beat hot on the garden, which could be seen through the open french doors.

Sergeant Hammond let his glance slowly travel the length of the long room lined with one bookshelf after another on both walls. Every one of the hundreds of books looked as if

it had been read and used many times.

At the far end of the room, near the door through which Hammond had just entered, four people sat huddled in their chairs.

"All right," Sergeant Hammond said. "You first, Mr. Kensington." He turned to the big beefy man who sat in the nearest chair. "You were found standing over the body. From what everyone tells me, it was no secret that you were in love with the dead man's wife. Is that true?"

Kensington looked up and glared at Hammond, and then said, "I want to call my lawyer."

Hammond shrugged and nodded his head at the small blonde woman sitting in the next chair. "How about you, Mrs. Kensington? Did you know your husband was carrying on an affair with another woman?"

She sighed and then straightened

in her chair. "Yes, I did. He asked me for a divorce today."

"Did you agree?"

"Yes. We were out in the hall, and when I told him he could have his divorce, he said he was going inside and tell Arnold and ask him to divorce his wife."

"What happened then?"

"He left me, walked to the door, opened it and then slammed it shut. Right after that I heard Arnold cry out."

"What did you do then?"

"I was petrified for a moment, then I opened the door and saw my husband standing at the other end of the room over Arnold."

"Did your husband have the letter opener in his hand?"

"No. It was sticking out of Arnold's chest." She shuddered and covered her face with her hands.

"And what's your story?" Hammond said to the woman in a maid's

uniform sitting in the third chair.

"I was in the other room, Sergeant. I heard the door slam and then I heard the cry and then I came running in here."

"And what did you see?"

"I was right behind Mrs. Kensington. I saw the same thing she did. All of us just stood there, and then Mrs. Williams came in the door and screamed."

Hammond turned to the dark-haired woman in the fourth chair. "Mrs. Williams?" he said politely.

"I was out on the grounds," she said softly. "I heard my husband cry out, and I came running in to see what was wrong."

"Did he know you were having an affair with another man?"

Mrs. Williams flushed and lowered her eyes.

"All right," Hammond sighed. "You've all told me enough. I know which one of you killed him."



MUGGED AND PRINTED

ERSKINE CALDWELL, author of *God's Little Acre*, *Tobacco Road* and many other world-famous novels, returns to *Manhunt* this



month with his newest story, the surprising and realistic *In Memory Of Judith Courtright*. Caldwell gets the ideas for many of his stories from his frequent cross-country trips, during which he stops over in small towns, listens to the local gossip and takes

mental note of ideas, incidents or characters which might make good stories. *In Memory Of Judith Courtright* might have started just that way — it takes place in the South, where many of Caldwell's best-known stories take place.

BRETT HALLIDAY's tough and sympathetic private eye, Michael Shayne, returns to *Manhunt* this month in Halliday's complete new novel, *A Stranger In Town*.



Shayne has appeared in many best-selling novels, including *When Dorinda Dances* and *Call For Michael Shayne*, and is one of the most popular detectives now appearing. Brett Halliday lives in Connecticut with his wife, the

mystery novelist Helen McCloy, and is now at work on a new Michael Shayne mystery novel.

JONATHAN CRAIG's latest Police Files story, *The Spoilers*, is the most unusual novelette yet, in this popular series. ♦ STEPHEN MARLOWE makes his debut in *Manhunt* this issue with the brutal *Blonde At The Wheel*. Marlowe is the author of several novels including *Model For Murder* and a Gold Medal book featuring a brand-new detective character, Chester Drum, *The Second Longest Night*, which will soon appear on the newsstands. ♦ ROBERT TURNER, a familiar figure to *Manhunt* readers who remember his startling *Necktie Party* and other stories, returns this month with an equally arresting story: *Field Of Honor*. ♦ JOHN A. SENTRY makes his debut in *Manhunt* this month with one of the most unusual stories we've ever published: the surprising *The Hunter*.

HAL ELLSON's latest novelette, *Tell Them Nothing*, is another in his tough and brutal studies of life in New York's Harlem. Like his

novels, *Duke*, *Summer Street*, *Tomboy* and *The Golden Spike*, *Tell Them Nothing* is drawn from the actual lives of the juvenile delinquents now growing up in Harlem. Ellson's latest book is *Rock*, an expanded and rewritten version of the *Manhunt*




novelette *Blood Brothers* (which appeared in our April 1955 issue) — the novel has already received terrific praise, and promises to sell as well as *Duke*, which has run up a record of a million and a quarter copies thus far.

GIL BREWER's latest story for *Manhunt* is the shocking *I Saw Her Die*. Brewer is a Floridian whose best-selling books include the Gold

Medal novels *13 French Street* and, most recently, *77 Rue Paradis*. Brewer's preoccupation with street-numbers is one facet of a strong passion for absolute realism, and you'll find that realism evident again in *I Saw Her Die*. Brewer is now at work on some more short stories for *Manhunt*, and on a new novel. We'll bring you more Brewer soon.



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